MAKING ISLAM FIT
IBN ʻARABI AND THE IDEA OF SUFISM IN THE WEST

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ABSTRACT

GREGORY A. LIPTON: Making Islam Fit: Ibn 'Arabi and the Idea of Sufism in the West
(Under the direction of Carl W. Ernst)

This dissertation explores how the medieval writings of the Andalusian

metaphysician Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) have been read in light of particular

Western interpretive assumptions that presuppose shared transhistorical and transcultural

ideals of religious authenticity. Although Ibn 'Arabi is commonly portrayed in the West as a

premodern Muslim exemplar of religious pluralism who accepted all revealed religions as

contemporaneously valid, a careful reading of his textual positions brings into focus an

absolutist discourse of supersessionism based upon the exclusive superiority of Islam and its

abrogation of all previous religious dispensations. By analyzing the discursive practices that

have been anachronistically employed and normalized in contemporary universalist

constructions of Ibn 'Arabi and Sufism, this study aims to throw into relief how such

practices are linked to deeper genealogies of modern European thought, how they create

religious and ethnoracial difference, what kinds of religious subjectivities they authorize, and

what kinds they exclude.

For Bilal

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

*Modernity does not necessarily lead to a decline of religion. What it does lead to,
more or less necessarily, is religious pluralism.*[1]

The following study can be situated as a comparative analysis of religious discourse

broadly construed. It analyzes regnant discourses in the contemporary "Western"[2] reception

of the Andalusian metaphysician Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240)—or popularly Ibn

ʿArabī—that portray him as a religious pluralist or universalist who accepted all revealed

religions as contemporaneously valid.[3] Following the analytical insight that discourse is

determined by that which it excludes,[4] this study is built upon a careful and historicized

reading of Ibn ʿArabi's textual positions on the religious Other in comparison with prevalent

claims made by some of his most important Western interpreters. Although the weight of

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[1] Peter L. Berger, "Pluralism, Protestantization, and the Voluntary Principle," in *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*, ed. Thomas Banchoff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 21.

[2] Following Talal Asad and Walter Mignolo, I use "Western" and "the West" throughout this study to signify a critical ideological construct of modernity. As Asad notes, even though the West is not a "verifiable" object or integrated totality, it remains a global signifier for "innumerable intentions, practices, and discourses" that relate to a unique historicity claiming to be "the universal civilization." More specifically, "[t]he West," according to Mignolo, "refers to an economic and ideological configuration centered on capitalism, Christianity, and whiteness […]." See Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 18-19; and Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 435.

[3] Ibn ʿArabi's full name is Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-ʿArabī al-Ḥātimī al-Ṭāʾī (560-638 A.H./1165-1240 C.E.). The practice of omitting the definite article "al-" from "Ibn al-ʿArabī" was supposedly adopted so as not to confuse him with his fellow Sevillian, the traditionalist Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1148). See A. Ateş, "Ibn al-ʿArabī," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 707.

[4] Marianne Jørgensen and Louise J. Phillips, "The Field of Discourse Analysis," in *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), 27.

such a comparative analysis is brought to bear on individual authors, the chapters that follow

are more concerned with the discursive formations that are (re)produced *through* their work.

By offering revised readings of Ibn ʻArabi's discourse on the religious Other, this study

unfurls a new backdrop against which the discursive practices of his universalist interpreters

are made to stand in sharp relief. The contours that surface enable such practices to be

tracked to deeper lineages of modern European thought and the presuppositions they harbor.

What follows, then, is an attempt to dig out buried formations of religious, ethnoracial, and

civilizational difference that have been normalized within Western universalist discourses on

Ibn ʻArabi and their accompanying ideas of Sufism. Through critically analyzing the limits of

pluralism imposed in such discourses, this study aims to bring into view how historically

situated ideals frame universalist constructions of religious authenticity, what kinds of

religious subjectivities such ideals authorize, and what kinds they exclude.

Discourses in Play

As the only medieval Muslim "mystic," or Sufi, to have a Western society—and an

attendant scholarly journal—established in his honor with branches in England and

America,[5] the enthusiastic Western reception of Ibn ʻArabi is exceeded only by that of his

celebrated contemporary Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), who is often cited as the "best-selling"

poet in America.[6] While Ibn ʻArabi is also a revered poet made famous by his verses that

claim to "*follow the religion of love,*" the bulk of his voluminous corpus is comprised of a

highly specialized and recondite metaphysical prose, making him significantly less accessible

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[5] I.e., The Muhyiddin Ibn ʻArabi Society; see www.ibnarabisociety.org/index.html.

[6] Carl W. Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15, no. 1 (2005): 23.

than Rumi.[7] Nevertheless, Ibn 'Arabi's monistic leaning "mysticism" has a long-standing and popular correlation with the so-called doctrine of "the unity of being" (waḥdat al-wujūd). While the term was never explicitly used by Ibn 'Arabi himself, it has come to emblematically represent his unitive metaphysics, signifying God as the ontological reality of all things.[8]

Yet more importantly for this study, Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of "the unity of being" is often associated in the West with the ostensibly similar concept of "the transcendent unity of religions"—the emblematic phrase associated with the discourse of the Swiss-German esotericist Frithjof Schuon (d. 1998) and also the title of his first major work.[9] In the second half of the twentieth century, Schuon not only served as the leader of the first organized "traditional" European Sufi order (ṭarīqa),[10] but upon the death of his French Traditionalist predecessor René Guénon in 1951, he became the foremost representative of the Perennial Philosophy (philosophia perennis).[11] The Transcendent Unity of Religions (De l'Unité

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[7] Current estimates on the total number of Ibn 'Arabi's works range between 300 to 400 works of varying size that span only a few pages to his multivolume al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya (The Meccan Openings). The 2004 Dār Ṣādir edition of the Futūḥāt that I refer to in this study comprises a total of 2949 pages in small Arabic type. See Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2004). See also Alexander D. Knysh, Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 9.

[8] See William Chittick, "Rūmī and waḥdat al-wujūd," in Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rūmī, ed. Amin Banani, Richard Hovannisian, and Georges Sabagh (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 71, 75, 87, passim.

[9] E.g., see Eric Geoffroy, Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2010), 184, 187. See also Thierry Zarcone, "Rereadings and Transformations of Sufism in the West," Diogenes 47, no. 187 (1999): 116.

[10] Under the Muslim name of ʿlsa Nūr ad-Dīn, Schuon headed a European branch of the Shādhiliyya-ʿAlāwiyya ṭarīqa founded by Ahmad al-ʿAlāwī in Mostaganem, Algeria. See Mark J. Sedgwick, "The 'Traditionalist' Shâdhiliyya in the West: Guénonians and Schuonians," in Une voie soufie dans le monde: la Shâdhiliyya, ed. Eric Geoffroy (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2005), 461-64.

[11] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Frithjof Schuon and the Islamic Tradition," in The Essential Sophia, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Katherine O'Brien (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 258.

transcendante des Religions, 1948) argues that a transhistorical religious essence—which

Schuon would later identify as the Perennial Religion (*religio perennis*)—unifies all religious

traditions beyond the limits of exoteric absolutism and thus embraces all contemporary

"orthodox" religions as universally valid means to the divine. According to Perennialist

thought, such religious universalism forms the basis of the most ancient wisdom and is the

sacred inheritance of all great mystics from every religious tradition.[12]

    Echoing self-critical discussions in the field of religious studies over the past

decade,[13] Tomoko Masuzawa notes that "[t]he idea of the fundamental unity of religions—or

what may be reasonably termed liberal universalism—has been in evidence in much of the

comparative enterprise since the nineteenth century […]."[14] Yet, Masuzawa reasonably

submits that "many of today's scholars would likely contest, rather than accept, this

presumption that the unity of 'religious experience' should be the basis of religion as an

academic discipline."[15] While such a position may be less common in religious studies today,

it still plays a critical discursive role in the academic study of Ibn 'Arabi.[16]

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[12] The concept of a perennial philosophy (*philosophia perennis*) was first introduced by Agostino Steuco (d. 1548) in his work *De perenni philosophia* (1540). Although a Catholic bishop who served as the librarian at the Vatican Library, he adhered to a type of "Platonic monism" and believed that true theology "is nothing other than the revealed truth which has been known to mankind from the earliest times." Charles B. Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27, no. 4 (1966): 515, 518. As Hanegraaff notes, since Leibniz made reference to the term *perennis philosophia* without attributing it to Steuco, it was loosened from its original Catholic moorings in the Renaissance and entered into more generalized usage. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Tradition," *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1130.

[13] E.g., Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[14] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 316n6.

[15] Ibid., 316.

[16] Wouter Hanegraaff calls this position the "religionist perspective," which he associates with Schuonian Perennialism and the "transcendent unity of religions." See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and*

Although Schuon's large corpus of over thirty works remains relatively obscure, his Perennialist framework commands one of the most dominant knowledge regimes in the contemporary Western reception of Ibn 'Arabi. Indeed, James Morris, a leading Western expert on Ibn 'Arabi, has recently acknowledged Schuon's ubiquitous influence in interpreting and transmitting Ibn 'Arabi's thought to "academic specialists in the spiritual dimensions of religious studies."[17] Yet, up until the present study, there has been no discursive analysis of Western universalist constructions of Ibn 'Arabi in terms of Schuonian discourse and little critical analysis of Schuon's discursive practices outside the boundaries of his own language-game.[18]

In addition to continued associations with the Schuonian concept of the transcendent unity of religions, Ibn 'Arabi has also been portrayed as a premodern representative of secular-liberal religiosity. In discourses that repeatedly appear after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Ibn 'Arabi has emerged as the premodern progenitor of a "European" Islam notable for his rational pluralism in contradistinction to the irrational exclusivity of fundamentalist Islam.[19] Here, Ibn 'Arabi's unitive metaphysics, and the Sufism it represents, has been reduced to the mystical source of a proto-European universalism. While not directly

Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 5n17, 52n38. Regarding the presence of Traditionalist thought in current modalities of Islamic studies generally, see Carl W. Ernst, "Traditionalism, the Perennial Philosophy, and Islamic Studies" _Middle East Studies Association Bulletin_ 28, no. 2 (1994): 176-81.

[17] James Winston Morris, "Ibn 'Arabi in the 'Far West,'" _Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society_ 24 (2001): 106, 106n23.

[18] While recently there have been a few important critical treatments of Schuon, these are primarily socio-cultural and historical analyses that mainly focus on his life and works, spiritual claims, personal cult, and the scandal that surrounded him in Bloomington, Indiana; yet, for the most part they do not offer sustained analyses of his discourse itself in terms of a broader politics of knowledge outside of the discursive field of Perennialism. For an overview of current scholarship on Schuon including these works see chapter 3, p. 169, 169nn27-28.

[19] E.g., Stephen Schwartz, _The Other Islam: Sufism and the Road to Global Harmony_ (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 90.

affiliated with Schuonian Perennialism, this Kantian mode of liberal universalist discourse shares important overlapping practices with Schuonian discourse that are brought to light in the second half of this study.

While Ibn 'Arabi's *ultimate* soteriological vision is informed by a radical hermeneutic of mercy acknowledging that even those in eternal damnation will eventually find contentment and bliss, close readings of his positions on the religious Other reveal an absolutist religious discourse based upon the abrogation (*naskh*) of Islam over all previous religions and the textual corruption (*taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*) of pre-Qur'anic scripture. Although Ibn 'Arabi's so-called monism is submersed within a metaphysics of love that is often taken in the West to be opposed to religious exclusivism, this study foundationally argues that the entire structure of his anthropology, cosmology, and cosmography is built upon an exclusive and absolute supersession of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Framing Tension: Religious Absolutism and the Mystical Exception

In the contemporary West, religious absolutism is often understood to be the bane of global religious flourishing and a leading cause of intolerance and violence.[20] Such a conviction has a long history in modern thought and often situated in the so-called "wars of religion" of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. It is the exclusivity of competing religious doctrines, so the argument went, and still goes, that instills within their adherents an uncanny and eager willingness to kill their rivals. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau (d. 1778) concisely summarized: "It is impossible to live at peace with people whom we believe to be

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[20] E.g., John Hick argues that "religious absolutism" that claims to "absolute validity and to a consequent superiority" has led to intolerance and violence not only in Christianity, but in "almost every tradition." John Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), 17. For a critical analysis of the argument that religious absolutism causes violence see William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19-26.

damned; to love them would be to hate God who punishes them."[21]

Yet, the commonly held notion that religious absolutism caused the so-called wars of religion (and thus the rise of the modern state resolved them) is historically untenable. Rather, as William Cavanaugh forcefully argues, the very distinction between religion and politics was itself instigated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the transference of power from the church to the new sovereign state. The so-called wars of religion were thus "fought by state-building elites for the purpose of consolidating their power over the church and other rivals."[22] While the church was deeply involved in such violence, the birth of the modern state was the real catalyst for such upheavals rather than religious fanaticism.[23]

Nevertheless, the assertion that the European wars of religion are evidence that public religiosity and its attendant absolutism causes violence has been, in Cavanaugh's words, a "creation myth for modernity"—a myth not only used as justification for Western secularism, but one also "inextricably bound up with the legitimation of the state and its use of violence."[24] In the face of the myth of religious violence, the Enlightenment impetus to relegate religion to a mode of private belief secluded from the socio-political realm was sanctioned as critical for Western progress. As Grace Jantzen notes, in response to the "wars of religion," seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophers such as Locke, Hume, and Kant were compelled to separate religion from politics and economics. As such, the modern

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[21] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses,* trans. and ed. Susan Dunn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 253.

[22] Cavanaugh, *The Myth*, 162.

[23] Ibid., 166, 177. A major proof for this assertion is that much of the violence was carried out against members of the same church, while those of different denominations often collaborated (ibid., 142).

[24] Ibid., 123-24.

turn towards the subject along with the increasing privatization of religion produced a particular conception of religious experience

> as essentially a private, inner state, having nothing to do with outer, public realities. It was, instead, a strictly personal matter. It could, however, be cultivated; and could produce states of calm and tranquility which would enable return to those public realities with less anxiety and inner turmoil. Understood in these terms, *mysticism becomes domesticated, is rendered unthreatening to the public political realm.*[25]

Through such domestication, Jantzen concludes, mysticism has thus "*become safe.*"[26]

Indeed in the twentieth century, the category of "mysticism" emerges as a discursive site carrying with it the aura of authentic religiosity that is often called upon as a refuge from the discord of religious rivalry and absolutism. Thus, no less of a scholar than Wilfred Cantwell Smith would claim in his late work *Towards a World Theology* that while a pluralistic world community based upon a "theology of comparative religion" was only now just beginning to emerge, "[t]he mystics have seen, and felt, and indeed known, that community all along."[27] Indeed, as Smith specifically notes elsewhere regarding Ibn 'Arabi's "metaphysical monism"—*in opposition to* communal and "formalist" Islam—"to believe in the ultimate unity of the world and the universe is to believe also in the unity of humankind."[28] Yet, such dichotomies between religious absolutism and premodern mysticism have proven increasingly difficult to sustain.[29]

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[25] Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 345.

[26] Ibid., 345 (emphasis mine).

[27] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), 125-26 (emphasis original).

[28] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), 190. Here, Smith specifically contrasts the Indian Naqshbandī Sufi Aḥmad Sirhindi's "supersession of Ibn al-ʿArabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd* by his new *waḥdat al-shuhūd*." Smith also identifies Sirhindi's new movement as "promoting a rigid, structured, systematic communalism" (ibid., 189). Elsewhere Smith notes: "The Ṣūfī poet and mystic, on the one hand […] has been sensitive to faith wherever it be found, and has given expression to his humane— and divine—vision […]. The systematizer, on the other hand, whether conceptually (*mutakallim*) or morally-

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Orientations: Constructing the Discursive Image

In her Foucauldian interrogation of Christian mysticism, and its hegemonic legacy of patriarchal domination, Jantzen notes that the Western conception of "mysticism" is "a constantly shifting social and historical construction."[30] The construction of what counts as "mysticism" is thus reflective of "*the institutions of power in which it occurs*."[31] Although such a constructivist frame is hardly new, it nevertheless serves as the theoretical fulcrum around which this study pivots by attending to Western constructions of Ibn ʿArabi and the concurrent idea of Sufism as products of particular knowledge regimes involved in the ideological projection, universalization, and regulation of "truth."

While the chapters that follow are thus concerned with the reception of Ibn ʿArabi's thought rather than his biography, the image of Ibn ʿArabi as constructed through interpretive discourse overlaps in important ways the hagiographical construction of a discursive icon— what Frank Reynolds and Donald Capps call a "biographic image" that combines select

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legally (*faqīh*), has been largely exclusivist." Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief: the Difference between Them* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998), 207n41.

[29] While such characterizations of the dichotomy between Ibn ʿArabi and Sirhindi (as noted directly above), and their respective doctrines, were common during Smith's day, they have since been considerably rethought. One of the most salient examples countering Smith's claim is that of the Indian Chishtī-Ṣabirī Sufi ʿAbd al-Quddūs Gangōhī (d. 1537) who was not only a famous adherent of Ibn ʿArabi's *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the Indian Sufi tradition, but was equally renown for his appropriation of Nathapanthi Yogic traditions. Yet, as David Damrel points out, Abd al-Quddūs was also notable for his staunch attachment to the sharia and his religious absolutism. This is most clearly expressed in a letter he wrote to the Mughal emperor Bābur (r. 1526-1530) in which he not only calls upon him to enforce the sharia, but prohibits him employing any non-Muslim (*kāfir*) in his administration. Moreover, he demands that non-Muslims should be forced to pay the poll-tax (*jizya*) and should not dress like Muslims or practice their faith in public. David W. Damrel, "The 'Naqshbandī Reaction' Reconsidered," in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 177-79, 183-84. Abd al-Quddūs's letter to Bābur is significant in its similarity to Ibn ʿArabi's letter to the Seljuk Sultan of Anatolia, ʿIzz al-Dīn Kaykāʾus I (r. 1211-20) discussed at the start of chapter 1. For an excellent survey of Islamic universalism in the Indian context see Carl W. Ernst, "The Limits of Universalism in Islamic Thought: The Case of Indian Religions," *The Muslim World* 101 (2011): 1-19.

[30] Jantzen, *Power*, 24.

[31] Ibid., 14 (emphasis mine).

biographical facts with the ideals of a religious tradition.[32] As Tony Stewart notes, the

discursive memory of a shaykh written by a hagiographer is "shaped by what is deemed

relevant by the author."[33] The shaykh is thus, according to Stewart, "only the 'ostensible

subject,' providing the opportunity to articulate the religious ideal."[34] It is through this sense

of an "ostensible" subject that I approach Ibn 'Arabi as a Western "discursive image"—i.e.,

as an ideological construction of a "religious ideal."

    While Ibn 'Arabi's discursive image in the West has varied since his initial reception

in the late nineteenth century—either as an antinomian thinker or more recently as an

"orthodox" Muslim—he has been, for the most part, received by Western scholars in a

positive light.[35] As Alexander Knysh notes, "the Western audience has been presented with a

thoroughly sanitized (and generally sympathetic) portrait of the Sufi thinker and his

teaching."[36] Indeed, Knysh's monograph *Ibn ʿArabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*, which

analyzes the medieval Arab construction of Ibn 'Arabi's polemical image, is a rare exception

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[32] Frank E. Reynolds and Donald Capps introduction to *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and Donald Capps (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 4.

[33] Tony K. Stewart, "The Subject and the Ostensible Subject: Mapping the Genre of Hagiography among South Asian Chishtis," in *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 229.

[34] Ibid., 237.

[35] Ibn 'Arabi gained prominence early on in the Western study of Sufism through the translation of his lexicon of Sufi terms. As Alexander Knysh notes, Gustav Flügel's (d. 1870) early Latin translation of Ibn 'Arabi's lexicon along with Aloys Sprenger's critical edition of the Sufi lexicon of Ibn 'Arabi's commentator ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshāni (d. 1329), formed a major component "for the subsequent advancement of Sufi studies in Europe." Alexander Knysh, "Historiography of Sufi Studies in the West," in *A Companion to the History of the Middle East*, ed. Youssef M. Choueiri (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 109.

[36] Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi*, 18ff. Knysh presents an invaluable survey of Ibn 'Arabi's critical premodern Arab reception and those who rather than finding him to be the "Shaykh al-Akbar" (the Greatest Master), considered him a dangerous heretic whose thought posed nothing less than a threat to the entire moral edifice of Muslim society. Such criticism was most notably propounded early on by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), al-Dhahabi (d. 1348), Ibn Khatib (d. 1375), and Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406). See ibid., 96-106; 116, 179-97, passim.

within Western scholarship on Ibn 'Arabi.[37] For the most part, such scholarship has paid

scant attention to Ibn 'Arabi's discursive reception and has instead focused primarily on

translating and interpreting his metaphysical ideas based upon a small group of his

premodern followers.[38] The only full length work to offer a critical analysis of Ibn 'Arabi's

contemporary reception in the West to date is Suha Taji-Farouki's *Beshara and Ibn 'Arabi*.

In this socio-cultural analysis, Taji-Farouki explores the nexus between New Age thought

and the Beshara spiritual movement, which she situates as a new religious movement

founded on a highly essentialized version of Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics.[39]

Although Taji-Farouki's careful work is a valuable scholarly contribution to the

understanding of Beshara as a spiritual movement, her analysis of the movement's discursive

appropriation of Ibn 'Arabi lacks a critical evaluation of its involvement within a wider

politics of knowledge—what Richard King has called a "cultural field of power relations."[40]

As such, the present work is the only study to date to offer a sustained analysis of Ibn

'Arabi's discursive reception in the West in relation to broader lineages of European

knowledge regimes and their attendant discursive practices of subject formation.

Like the discourse that I analyze in this study, the Beshara movement emphasizes Ibn

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[37] Of note in this genre is Omid Safi's preliminary study of Ibn 'Arabi's biographical image presented in Shams al-Dīn Tabrīzī's *Maqālāt-i shams-i tabrīzī*. See Omid Safi, "Did the Two Oceans Meet?: Connections and Disconnections between Ibn al-ʿArabī and Rūmī," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* 26 (1999): 55-88.

[38] Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi*, 18.

[39] Suha Taji-Farouki, *Beshara and Ibn 'Arabi: A Movement of Sufi Spirituality in the Modern World* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2007), 194-206. The Beshara movement and its attendant esoteric school was founded by the Turkish spiritual leader Bulent Rauf (d. 1987) in the early 70s. The above mentioned Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society and scholarly journal is attached to the movement.

[40] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1. The reasons for Taji-Farouki's restrained critique may be due in part to the fact that her study was published by Anqa Publishing, which is run by students of Beshara and affiliated with the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society. See: www.ibn-arabi.com/aboutanqa.htm.

'Arabi's universalism. Yet unlike the material I explore, which ostensibly acknowledges the importance of Islam in Ibn 'Arabi's thought, the Beshara movement explicitly denies that Ibn 'Arabi held Islam, or any other religious orientation, as metaphysically important. Indeed, as Taji-Farouki puts it, the Beshara movement's "projection of Ibn 'Arabi's teaching assigns no role to religion in its actualisation and in the fulfilment of man's spiritual evolution […]."[41] Such a perspective, as Taji-Farouki herself notes, is "antithetical" to the Perennialist/ Traditionalist perspective, where

> the great orthodox religions represent forms of divine gnosis adapted providentially to different circumstances. As embodiments of perennial Truth they constitute the valid framework for the spiritual path and ultimately, through their initiatic traditions, for the highest form of spiritual realisation.[42]

Thus, the Perennialist discursive image of Ibn 'Arabi projects him as a "traditional" Muslim who adheres to the sacred law, i.e., sharia, of Islam. Yet importantly, such "adherence" is consistently construed within a universalist ideal that is opposed to religious absolutism and its political excrescences. Such double framing of Ibn 'Arabi as both a so-called "traditional" Muslim and one who disavowed religious absolutism is of primary concern to this study and, as the final chapter shows, has wider implications on Western discourses of Islamic reform.

Yet, while this study is concerned to show that Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysical thought was rooted within an absolutist religious doctrine, it is *not arguing* that he was an "orthodox" Muslim. Indeed, the oft-mentioned inadequacy of the term "orthodoxy" as an analytical category for the study of Islam reaches its apogee with Ibn 'Arabi.[43] At the height of the

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[41] Taji-Farouki, *Beshara and Ibn 'Arabi*, 181; see also 206-7.

[42] Ibid.

[43] For a survey of the scholarly problematization of the term in Islamic studies beginning with Ignaz Goldziher in the early twentieth century see Brett Wilson, "The Failure of Nomenclature: The Concept of 'Orthodoxy' in the Study of Islam," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2007): 169-94.

intellectual fluorescence of the Islamic Middle Period when Ibn ʿArabi was writing, as

Marshall Hodgson importantly notes, scholars were no longer tied to "the particular insights

of their own immediate tradition […]."[44] Rather, diverse opinions and ideas were available

from multiple currents of knowledge, schools, and doctrines. In such a fecund intellectual

environment, scholars commonly held several doctrinal commitments simultaneously.[45]

As will be discussed more in chapter 1, it is from within the medieval context of such

an atomistic collective paradigm of religious thought that the importance of a legal discourse

emerges. While philosophical and theological frameworks present absolute truth claims,

Islamic jurisprudence addresses questions of praxis that can more flexibly entertain opposing

views.[46] Thus, "the entire religious order of classical Islam," according to Sherman Jackson,

"was the product of a *legal* rather than a *philosophical* discourse."[47] Yet, part of the assumed

foundation of such unitive legal discourse, and its political corollaries, was an absolutist

conception of the Islamic dispensation as superseding all previous religious law. As John

Burton notes, "To Muslim scholars, the abrogation of Judaism and Christianity by Islam was

obvious."[48]

Just as medieval Christians understood Christianity as superseding Judaism, medieval

Muslim scholars understood Islam as superseding the dispensations of the People of the

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[44] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 154.

[45] As Hodgson notes, "A person could maintain a given viewpoint on the imâmate, one on questions of metaphysics or kalâm, and one on fiqh law; he could be, for instance, a Jamâʿî-Sunnî, a Muʿtazilî, and Ḥanafî." Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1, 67.

[46] Sherman A. Jackson, "Islam(s) East and West: Pluralism between No-Frills and Designer Fundamentalism," in *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?*, ed. Mary L. Dudziak (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 129-130.

[47] Ibid., 129 (emphasis original).

[48] John Burton, "Abrogation," in *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 11-12.

Book. As I argue in chapter 1, this was not only Ibn ʿArabi's position, but was characteristic

of his entire intellectual milieu. Indeed, even the irenic Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-

Shahrastānī (d. 1153), who has been described as an early proponent of "an ecumenical

Muslim worldview,"[49] staunchly held to the doctrine of abrogation (*naskh*). At the end of his

theological treatise *Nihāyat al-aqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām* (The Furthest Lengths in the

Knowledge of Theology), Shahrastānī's description of the progressive abrogation of each

revealed religion until the advent of Muhammad is a classic example of such discourse and

worth quoting here. In what follows, Shahrastānī concludes a lengthy rebuttal against the

Jewish claim that it is impossible for God to change His mind and abrogate the Jewish

dispensation after He has given the Jews the Torah.[50] Shahrastānī thus states:

> Each revealed law is abrogative (*nāsikha*) and clothes itself in another form until it ends at
> the perfection of all of the revealed laws, and they are all sealed by the Seal of the Prophets.
> There is nothing after the perfection and rectitude (*al-istiqāma*) except for the Hereafter (*al-
> maʿād*) and the Resurrection (*al-qiyāma*): "My advent and the hour is as (close) as these two
> (fingers)."[51] So, the creation is completed there and the command is completed here. Just as
> the creation is sealed by the perfection of the state of the sperm as a complete human being,
> so to is the revealed law (*al-sharīʿa*) sealed by the perfection of the state of the first revealed
> law (*al-sharʿ al-awwal*) as a completely perfect religion (*dīnan tāmman kāmilan*): "*Today I
> have perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and sanctioned for you
> Islam as a religion.*"[52] We are contented with God as a lord, with Islam as a religion (*dīn*),
> with Muhammad the chosen one (*al-muṣṭafā*), may God bless him and grant him peace, as a
> prophet, with the Qur'an as a book, with the Kaaba as a kiblah, and with the believers as our
> brothers.[53]

[49] Bruce Lawrence, "Shahrastānī, Al-," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., vol. 12 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 8267.

[50] Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb nihāyat al-aqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām*, ed. Alfred Guillaume (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthanna, 1964), 499. As Jacques Waardenburg notes, "The principal argument used specifically against Judaism concerned the doctrine of *naskh* (abrogation). […] Jewish theologians, by contrast, held that it is impossible for God to change his mind, as God does not change his decree and dispensation." Jacques Waardenburg, "The Medieval Period 650–1500," in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52.

[51] Bukhārī, *al-Riqāq*, 98.

[52] Qur'an 5:3

[53] al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb nihāyat al-aqdām*, 503.

Thus, rather than arguing for Ibn ʿArabi's "orthodoxy," this study argues for Ibn ʿArabi's intellectual participation in a juridical field of discourse that served as a formative hub around which more abstract discourses issued.

Although Ibn ʿArabi consistently enunciates Islamic absolutist frameworks, the Western discourse that I analyze in this study variously denies or disregards them. As a result, a universalist ideal is historically instantiated, thus creating a type of biographical image. Such anachronistic instantiation is what Wendy Brown has called a "buried order of politics"—i.e., a mode of "identity production and identity management in the context of orders of […] marginalization in which the production, the management, and the context themselves are disavowed."[54] In other words—*and this is the larger point*—constructions of Ibn ʿArabi's discursive image as a universalist who accepted all religions as contemporaneously valid are discursively hegemonic and ideological in that they furtively impose a religious ideal beyond the purview of its original intellectual context.[55]

As the second half of this study brings to light, a critical corollary to this anachronistic portrayal is that such discursive practice is inevitably traceable to historically situated, Eurocentric categories of religious authenticity made through a dichotomy between autonomous and heteronomous subjectivity. Here, "authentic" religiosity is associated with an autonomous "intellect" (in both Neoplatonic and Kantian forms), while religion that is heteronomously derived is thus inauthentic and irrational. In such discourse, late eighteenth

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[54] Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 14.

[55] As Hugh Nicholson notes, the attempt to regulate identity in this way is hegemonic in that it attempts to extend the influence of an idea of religion "beyond the circle of those whose basic outlook it expresses." Hugh Nicholson, *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

and nineteenth century Indo- and Greco-European ethnoracial superiority is posited against a *Semitic* Other—i.e., both Jewish and, increasingly, Muslim.

As such, this study argues that Western assertions seeking to unite Ibn 'Arabi's thought with religious pluralism and universalism discursively echo modern European ideological and hegemonic attempts to defang Semitic difference. In such discourse, Ibn 'Arabi's medieval recourse to revealed heteronomy is tolerated as long as he is anachronistically understood to "transcend" religious form and thus pluralistically acknowledge the contradictory truth claims and practices of other traditions by situating them as secondary and accidental. This particularly modern mode of religious universalism claims to pluralistically accept "the essential core" of every religion, *but at the cost of religious and socio-historical difference*. As Brown notes, such a mode of European universalism dissociates autonomous rationality from notions of heteronomous belief and practice where such external modalities are deemed "*contextual rather than constitutive*."[56]

Although absolutist notions of religious supersessionism and socio-political authority are relegated as accidental to Ibn 'Arabi's contemporary Western discursive image, the Andalusian Sufi's own self-image was one clearly forged within the medieval crucible of religious rivalry and exclusivism. Thus following Nicholson's recent disavowal of "*a nonrelational and nonpolitical core of religious experience*,"[57] I argue that the wider religio-political absolutism of Ibn 'Arabi's intellectual milieu cannot be dissociated from his own metaphysical anthropology, cosmology, and cosmography. Ibn 'Arabi's monistic discourse

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[56] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 152 (emphasis mine).

[57] Nicholson, *Comparative Theology*, 11 (emphasis mine). As Nicholson further states: "The modern theological project of freeing religious conviction from the manifestations of social antagonism can be understood, in fact, as simply a ramification of the larger cultural processes of neutralization and depoliticization […], i.e., "the displacement of religion as the controlling domain of culture" (ibid., 50).

purposefully blurs the dialectical boundaries between the human and the divine, thus marking

attempts to decisively distinguish between his religious, mystical, and socio-political nodes

as reflective of Western religious ideals and sensibilities—and their ideological strategies of

persuasion—rather than the original ideas of Ibn ‘Arabi himself.

While the need for religious tolerance in global modernity is a truism, the use of

universalism to sanction Eurocentric categories of religious authenticity has been so

normalized within modern European history it is often overlooked. As Elizabeth Castelli

warns, "the double-edged character of the ‘universal’ […] needs to remain both fully in view

and under continued interrogation."[58] Like "religion" and "mysticism," those in positions of

discursive power define the "universal" to fit their own ideological ideals of "truth," while

those who hold to alternative viewpoints are adjudicated enemies of such ideals and thus

made intolerable.[59] As detailed in the latter part of this study, when Western ideals of what

counts as religious authenticity are uncritically dissociated from their sociohistorical contexts

and universalized, they side-slip into hegemonic models of cultural and religious reform.

Indeed, such a paradigm of universalization, as Brown notes, was evinced in the late

eighteenth and nineteenth century European process of Jewish emancipation where

> [t]he anomalous status of Jews in Europe during the medieval and early modern periods—
> "in" but not "of" various European nations—had to be resolved. And to that end, Jews had to
> be brought within the ambit and orbit of the state, *a process that involved incorporation into
> a nation increasingly defined through abstract, universal citizenship.*[60]

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[58] Elizabeth A. Castelli, "Theologizing Human Rights: Christian Activism and the Limits of Religious Freedom," in *Nongovernmental Politics*, ed. Michel Feher, Gaelle Krikorian, and Yates McKee (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 685.

[59] As Wendy Brown notes: "When a tolerant civilization meets its limits, it says not that it is encountering political or cultural difference but that it is encountering the limits of civilization itself. At that point, the tolerant civilization is justified not only in refusing to extend tolerance to its Other but in treating it as hostile […]." Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 203.

[60] Ibid., 53 (emphasis mine).

Thus to enter into the privilege of such universal citizenship, Jews had to dissociate from the Jewish nation and its attendant laws and practices. In other words, "*Jews had to be made to fit*," and as Brown trenchantly notes, "for that they needed to be transformed, cleaned up, and normalized, *even as they were still marked as Jews*."[61]

Chapter Outline

This study proceeds in two overlapping parts. The first analyzes contemporary Western imaginal formations of Ibn 'Arabi by comparing his original textual discourse with regnant claims made by his universalist interpreters, while the second part traces the discursive rules that inform such claims to broader genealogies of Western knowledge regimes and their attendant practices of subject formation.

The tension that undergirds this study is set by chapter 1 and is framed by two seemingly opposite discursive examples: (i) Ibn 'Arabi's (in)famous letter to the Seljuk Sultan of Anatolia calling on him to impose the rigor of Islamic law upon Christians in his realm, and (ii) Ibn 'Arabi's celebrated verses from the *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* that claim to follow "the religion of love." As such, this chapter seeks to show that although Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics is usually noted for its expansive monistic theology of love, it is *also* based upon an overarching mode of Islamic supersessionism and its attendant doctrine of abrogation (*naskh*).

While scholars have argued that Ibn 'Arabi's continual discursive recourse to Islamic law is merely a political expedient, chapter 1 historicizes Ibn 'Arabi's work within his larger discursive milieu of the Islamic Middle Period and the intellectual predominance of sharia consciousness. Through close readings of Ibn 'Arabi's texts in comparison with

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[61] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 53.

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contemporary universalist readings, this chapter argues that the outward importance of the sharia, *and its attendant absolutism*, cannot be separated from the rest of Ibn 'Arabi's "mysticism." Although chapter 1 definitively disproves Perennialist assertions that Ibn 'Arabi did not believe that Judaism and Christianity were abrogated by Islam, it adds nuance to this issue by showing that through obedience to the Qur'anic command of 9:29 and the payment of the poll-tax (*jizya*) the People of the Book retain a mode of inferior validity as metaphysically subsumed within the broader cosmography of Ibn 'Arabi's conception of Islam and the absolute cosmological authority of the Prophet Muhammad. Rather than a statement of religious universalism, Ibn 'Arabi's "religion of love" thus emerges first and foremost as a "religion" based upon the metaphysical triumph of the Muhammadan saint and his comprehensive theophanic totality.

Chapter 2 throws into relief the rules of formation that have sustained Schuonian Perennialism as a dominant discursive regime in the Western construction of Ibn 'Arabi and Sufism. Divided roughly in two parts, the first historicizes Schuonian Perennialism and establishes its prominence within the contemporary Western interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi. Through a comparison with the religious discourse of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Schuonian Perennialism is thus situated within a modern "experiential-expressivist" model of religious universalism notable for its essentializing recourse to a transcendent religious *a priori* and self-conscious "Copernican" turn away from premodern models of religious exclusivism.

The second part of chapter 2 resumes close readings of Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on the People of the Book in comparison with the assertions made by his foremost Schuonian commentators. Building upon the more generalized Middle Period intellectual historicization offered in chapter 1, this chapter historicizes Ibn 'Arabi's positions on the People of the Book

from within the local context of his Andalusian home of Seville and his intellectual engagement with the Andalusian polemicist and Ẓāhirī scholar Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064). The remainder of this chapter thus explores traditional polemical debates regarding the "validity" of pre-Qur'anic scripture and Ibn 'Arabi's subsequent position on the corruption (*taḥrīf*) of previous revelation. Here, I show that Ibn 'Arabi holds that the scriptures of the People of the Book are textually corrupted and not simply wrongly interpreted as the Schuonian Perennialists claim. This chapter concludes by returning to the issue of the "validity" of the People of the Book brought up in chapter 1, and shows that Ibn 'Arabi concedes to the possibility of their redemptive felicity (*saʿāda*) through obedience to the Qur'anic command. Such discourse thus directly challenges the Perennialist notion that for Ibn 'Arabi religious achievement is attained through a gnostic response to a "valid" set of revealed symbols that ultimately transcends heteronomous frameworks of external authority.

Chapter 3 begins the second part of this study with a sustained analysis of Schuon's Perennialist discourse and his portrayal of Ibn 'Arabi and Sufism. Through a detailed comparison of Schuon's discursive practices to that of nineteenth century Aryanist discourse, this chapter argues that although Schuon's discourse claims to recognize the universal validity of all religions beyond the limits of exoteric exclusivity, it consistently presents as self-evident *the metaphysical superiority* of a so-called Aryan spiritual typology over that of the Semitic. Here, Ibn 'Arabi's own exclusive association with Islam and the Prophet Muhammad is rejected by Schuon as a heteronomous, and therefore less authentic, mode of spirituality in contrast to the more "essential" and autonomous religious truth of "pure metaphysics." As such, Schuon de-Semitizes and further Aryanizes Ibn 'Arabi in order to legitimize his own Aryan ideal of universal "authentic" religion, i.e., *the religio perennis*.

Chapter 4 concludes the second part of this study with a broader genealogical analysis of the Western discursive construction of rational Islamic mysticism, or what I call "reasonable Sufism," that has been present since its initial European "discovery." Here, I heuristically employ Kant's own "Copernican" mode of religious subjectivity—i.e., the "universal true religious faith"[62]—as representative of what David Pacini has called the "modern religion of conscience" that marks religious subjectivity as self-legislative rather than dependent upon a divine ontological order.[63] I thus argue that "Sufis," and increasingly the contemporary image of Ibn 'Arabi, serve in the discourse of reasonable Sufism as part of the fulfillment of a Kantian teleology of universal religion and its *metaphysics of autonomy*. In such discourse, an autonomously rational Sufism—specifically notable for its proximity to Greco-Christian humanism—serves as the *reflected image* of a Western imaginary of universal reason as juxtaposed to an irrationally heteronomous and Semitic Islam(*ism*). This chapter thus brings to light how the discourse of reasonable Sufism has been increasingly mobilized, especially post-9/11, as a model of reform that seeks to efface a heteronomous and irrational Muslim Other through a *universalization of sameness*.

In an integrative conclusion to this study, I link the discursive formations fleshed out in chapters 3 and 4 to a deeper genealogy of Western universalism. In contradistinction to Ibn 'Arabi's heteronomous absolutism explored in the first part of this study, I track how Kantian and Schuonian universalist discourses *functionally* converge in their insistence on the "transcendent" primacy of individual autonomy in opposition to a "slavish" Semitic Other.

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[62] Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009), 154.

[63] David S Pacini, *Through Narcissus' Glass Darkly: The Modern Religion of Conscience* (New York: Fodrdham University Press, 2008), 6-7.

While both Kantian and Schuonian universalist cosmologies reflect a similar "Copernican" turn to the subject, they also reflect the *imperial subjectivity* of the Copernican age itself and its attendant ideological conceit of a universal perspective that claims to transcend its own ethnocentric situatedness. I thus argue that it is precisely the discursive practices that form this Eurohegemonic tradition of universalism—and its attendant religious, racial, and civilizational superiority—through which the ideal of autonomous religious subjectivity has been normalized within the universalist discourses on Ibn ʿArabi and Sufism analyzed here.

I conclude by suggesting that the overlapping discursive formations of Kantian and Schuonian universalism conceal absolutist modalities of supersessionism that are ironically similar to those openly posited by Ibn ʿArabi. The exclusivism inherent within such discourse not only calls into question the Western ideal of "transcendent" universalism and the accompanying programs of liberal reform it authorizes, but also throws into relief the historically constituted and situated nature of religious discourse itself.

PART ONE

IMAGINAL FORMATIONS

CHAPTER ONE

IN THE TRIUMPHANT LIGHT OF THE SUN:
THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK AND IBN 'ARABI'S DISCOURSE OF QUALIFIED SUBJUGATION

Polite civilization, and the moral order it entrenches, can easily become lived as a self-sufficient framework within which to find the standards of our social, moral and political life; the only transcendent references admitted being those which underpin the order and do not justify infringing it.[1]

In a famous letter written in the year 1212 to the Seljuk Sultan of Anatolia, ʿIzz al-Dīn Kaykāʾus I (r. 1211-20), Ibn 'Arabi advised the newly enthroned king not to allow the Christians under his protection more socio-religious freedom than legally mandated by Islamic law (*sharīʿa*) for the "protected people" (*ahl al-dhimma*).[2] At the start of the letter, the Andalusian Sufi urges the king to "take care lest some day I find you among the most debased of Muslim leaders—those whose actions *'led them astray in the life of this world while they considered what they were doing to be good'* [Qur'an 18:104]."[3] Ibn 'Arabi sternly rebukes Kaykāʾus for persisting in violating divine prohibitions (*ḥudūd*) and further warns him not to mistake God's "respite" (*imhāl*) for his "inattention" (*ihmāl*), for at his

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[1] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 238-39.

[2] See Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 8 (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2004), 296-97 (Fut. IV, 547-48). As Claude Addas notes, Ibn 'Arabi was most likely introduced to Kaykāʾus by his friend Majd al-Dīn Isḥāq b. Yūsuf al-Rūmī, who was the father of Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī perhaps as early as 1205 when Kaykāʾus's father, Kaykhusraw (r. 1192-1196 and 1205-1211) was king. Regardless, Ibn 'Arabi seems to have developed a friendship with Kaykāʾus and served as an advisor in some capacity. See Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabī* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 225-34.

[3] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 8, 296 (Fut. IV, 547).

death regret will be of no avail.[4] Ibn 'Arabi then turns to the abject state of the Sultan's

kingdom:

> The calamity that Islam and Muslims are undergoing in your realm—and few address it—is the raising of Church bells, the display of disbelief (*kufr*), the proclamation of associationism (*shirk*), and the elimination of the stipulations (*al-shurūṭ*) that were imposed by the Prince of Believers, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (may God be pleased with him), upon the protected people (*ahl al-dhimma*).[5]

Not only does the Andalusian Sufi refer to Christians here as guilty of disbelief, or infidelity,

(*kufr*) and associationism (*shirk*), he details a long litany of discriminating provisions that the

Sultan should enforce.[6] Commonly referred to as "the Pact of ʿUmar" (*shurūṭ ʿUmar*), this

legendary accord traditionally ascribed to the Umayyad caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (r.

717-20)—and not to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb as Ibn 'Arabi does in the above passage—

stipulates that in exchange for protection and partial socio-religious freedom, the *ahl al-*

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] The text continues: "From among them are: the prohibition of establishing in the city or the surrounding area a church, convent, cell, or hermitage for monks; that they not rebuild that which has fallen into disrepair of those remaining; that they not prohibit their churches from sheltering Muslims for (up to) three nights while feeding them; that they not harbor spies; that they not secretly conspire against the Muslims; that they do not teach their children the Qur'an; that they do not manifest their associationism (*shirk*), that they do not prohibit their relatives from embracing Islam if they desire it; that they show reverence towards Muslims and give them their seats if they [Muslims] desire to sit; they do not try to imitate Muslims in anything from clothing, cap, turban, shoes, and parting of the hair; they should not be named by the names of Muslims or their sobriquets; that they do not ride on saddle nor gird a sword or take up any kind of arms; that they do not engrave their signets with Arabic; that they do not sell wine; that they do not cut their forelocks; that they must keep their manner of dressing the same wherever they are; that they must fasten sashes around their waists; that they must not display a cross or anything from their books on the path Muslims; that they do not put their dead near the vicinity of the Muslims; that they only strike bells lightly; that they not raise their voices by reciting in their churches near the presence of Muslims; that they do not go out in processions; that they should not raise their voices and display fires [in procession] with their dead; and that they should not buy slaves that have been apportioned for Muslims. If any thing from among what has been thus stipulated is violated, then there is no protection for them and it is permitted for the Muslims to deal with them as people of rebellion and sedition." Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 8, 296-97 (Fut. IV, 547-48). For a similar version (expressed in the voice of the Christians) see Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Source Book, 315-1791*, rev ed. (1938; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1999), 14-16.

dhimma submit to an extensive list of restrictions designed to show their subordinate status within Muslim society.[7]

While this passage has not gone altogether unnoticed by scholars who study Ibn ʿArabi, it is most often explained away by the insistence that such religiously exclusive statements are somehow separate from "authentic" mysticism. A typical example can be found in the introduction to R. W. J. Austin's now classic translation of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom), where he notes that Ibn ʿArabi's reply to Kaykāʾus "is very reveling of the *nonmystical* side of his character, since he advised Kay Kaus to impose on them the full rigor of Islamic Law […]."[8] Even William Chittick, who is one of the foremost Western experts on Ibn ʿArabi and noted for "boldly reclaim[ing] him for Islam,"[9] downplays the significance of such comments (although he does not acknowledge them directly) as juridico-religious lip service given to the powers that be in order to avoid the detection of his "real" metaphysical positions.[10] Chittick states:

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[7] As Milka Levy-Rubin notes, "Although it has been claimed (without due evidence) that some of these prohibitions may have been ascribed to ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz anachronistically, it seems quite unmistakable that the regulations of the *ghiyār* [distinguishing marks] were a product of his policy and ideology." Milka Levy-Rubin, "*Shurūṭ ʿUmar*: From Early Harbingers to Systematic Enforcement," in *Beyond Religious Borders: Interaction and Intellectual Exchange in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. David M. Freidenreich and Miriam Goldstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 33. Moreover, Levy-Rubin argues that by the second half of the ninth century these restrictions had become the norm rather than the exception in the treatment of the *dhimmīs* (ibid., 32). See also Milka Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 88-98.

[8] R. W. J. Austin, introduction to *The Bezels of Wisdom*, by Ibn al-ʿArabi, trans. R. W. J. Austin (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980), 10 (emphasis mine).

[9] Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 20.

[10] Such an approach is often found among Orientalists and Muslim modernists who suspect Ibn ʿArabi of bad faith. For example, Affifi decidedly called Ibn ʿArabi's use of "Islamic dogma" and "orthodox garb" a "sham." See A. E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyid Dīn-ibnul ʿArabī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), xi, 151. Following Affifi's lead, Landau notes: "Conscious of the dangers threatening an unorthodox thinker setting his views against those of the theologians representing authority, Ibn ʿArabi deliberately complicated his style. He would try to make an outrageously heterodox piece of argumentation look irreproachable by expressing it in the language or imagery of orthodoxy." Rom Landau, *The Philosophy of Ibn*

One would expect to find among the Sufis a clear exposition of the universality of revealed truth without reservations expressed by most other Muslims. But the Sufis had to take into account the beliefs of their contemporaries. Even Ibn al-ʿArabī, who was not afraid to attack the limitations of the juridical and theological mentalities, often defends a literal reading of the Koranic criticisms of the People of the Book, without suggesting that by "Christians" or "Jews" the Koran means anyone other *than the contemporary practitioners* of those religions.[11]

Thus according to Chittick, Ibn ʿArabi's criticism of the People of the Book is simply formal and employed in order to appease the ulama: what qualms the Qur'an might have had against the People of the Book should be understood as part of a particular socio-historical context, and therefore Ibn ʿArabi did not view such criticism as doctrinally related or relevant in other times and places.[12] Moreover, Chittick claims that Ibn ʿArabi rejects the classical Islamic juridical position of abrogation (*naskh*), which asserts that Islam superseded all previous revelation. Instead, Ibn ʿArabi, according to Chittick, recognizes the simultaneous and contemporaneous validity of all revealed religions.[13]

If the ideas regarding Christians enunciated in the missive to Kaykāʾus were an anomaly in Ibn ʿArabi's discourse, it would perhaps be easier to dismiss them; yet in this chapter, I posit that a careful reading of his writings reveals that even though Ibn ʿArabi's so-called monism is submersed within a theology of interminable love and mercy, it is

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ʿArabi (London, 1959), 24. Similarly, Fazlur Rahman has noted that the Sufi "lack of integration, indeed positive dislocation, between the Inner and the Outer leads to the suspicion that their insistence on the <u>Sharīʿah</u> is formal and even hypocritical. This dislocative attitude […] found its authoritative formulation in Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers." Fazlur Rahman, introduction to *Intik̲h̲āb-i Maktūbāt-i Shayk̲h̲ Aḥmad Sirhindī*, by Ahmad Sirhindī (Karachi: Iqbal Akadami, 1968), 51.

[11] William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-ʿArabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 125 (emphasis mine).

[12] Yet, Chittick has been taken to task for not even mentioning the Andalusian Sufi's letter to the Seljuk Sultan in his study on Ibn ʿArabi and religious diversity, *Imaginal Worlds*, quoted above. According to Carl-A. Keller, such an omission makes his "otherwise very penetrating observations […] rather one-sided." Carl-A. Keller, "Perceptions of Other Religions in Sufism," in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (New York : Oxford University Press, 1999), 189.

[13] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 125.

nevertheless built upon foundations strongly grounded within a medieval Islamic discursive tradition of abrogation and supersessionism that colors the entire edifice of his metaphysical cosmography. Moreover, Ibn 'Arabi's discourse does not depict such supersessionism as incommensurable with his theology of love; on the contrary, it provides its *necessary* foundation.

Rather than simply an *extra*-mystical component of his thought, I argue that Ibn 'Arabi's supersessionism and its attendant doctrine of abrogation should be understood as components within Ibn 'Arabi's larger metaphysical anthropology and cosmology of the Prophet Muhammad as the personification of the "*logoic*"[14] Muhammadan Reality (*ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*) and Ibn 'Arabi's assumed role as its saintly vicegerent. As such, Ibn 'Arabi's above assertion that Kaykāʾus follow the restrictions of the "the Pact of 'Umar" is perfectly consistent with what I refer to below as his doctrine of "qualified subjugation" regarding Jews and Christians and their subordinate status within his metaphysical cosmography of Islam. While recent "revisionist" attempts have been concerned to bring out what Alexander Knysh calls "the more conventional aspect of his legacy,"[15] they have neglected to flesh out the contours of such integrated and coherent supersessionism within Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics.[16]

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[14] I use the neologism "*logoic*" as an adjective of the Greek term *Logos*. Precedence for its academic use can be found in the works of the phenomenologist Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, who uses the term extensively. E.g., A. T. Tymieniecka, *Logos and Life: Impetus and Equipoise in the Life-Strategies of Reason* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000).

[15] Alexander Knysh calls these recent attempts "revisionist" in their attempt to revise "the stereotyped view that portrays him as a thoroughgoing esotericist who was completely oblivious to the external aspects of Islamic religion." Knysh specifically mentions James Morris, Michel Chodkiewicz, and William Chittick in this context. See Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi*, 10, 20-21, 281 n31.

[16] While these treatments do acknowledge such "supersessionism" in various ways, they inevitably dismiss it as inconsequential to Ibn 'Arabi's overall religious universalism and deny his doctrine of abrogation. Yet, Michel Chodkiewicz is a notable exception in that he does acknowledge the metaphysical significance of such supersessionist discourse in Ibn 'Arabi's work. Chodkiewicz's *Seal of the Saints* frames Ibn 'Arabi's

Approaching Ibn 'Arabi's Absolutism: Revisiting the Idea of "Proper" Mysticism

Besides the varying degrees of disavowal by Western scholars that authoritarian and exclusionary positions actually exist in Ibn 'Arabi's discourse in any meaningful way, his correspondence with the Anatolian Sultan has also engendered strong condemnation, albeit more rarely in contemporary Western contexts. For example, the Spanish Roman Catholic Priest and scholar of Sufism Miguel Asín Palacios (d. 1944) referred to the letter to Kaykāʾus as exuding "political hatred for the Christians."[17] Commenting more recently on the same issue, Carl-A. Keller asserts: "It is the tragedy of [Ibn 'Arabi's] faithfulness toward Islam that he was unable to work out different practical consequences of his spiritual insight."[18] Similarly, Giuseppe Scattolin observes that it is precisely such types of stipulations as that of "the Pact of 'Umar," which enforce the sharia over non-Muslims, that are fundamental to Islamist discourse today. As such, Scattolin calls Ibn 'Arabi's Sufism "a type of 'simplified and reductive' mysticism, based as it is on a 'simplified and reductive' vision of other religions […]."[19]

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supersessionism within the concept of "*verus propheta*" as "the long pilgrimage of the Muḥammadan Light through the aeons […]." Here, Chodkiewicz contextualizes the teleological process of the Muhammadan Reality (*ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*) as a formative doctrine for Ibn 'Arabi's thought. As Chodkiewicz notes, according to this doctrine "the successive prophetic messages, as multiple manifestations of the one Truth, are so many stages leading up to him who will bring the 'full sum of the Words' (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*), simultaneously perfecting and abrogating the previous Laws." Although Chodkiewicz importantly notes Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine regarding the People of the Book in passing (what I call "qualified subjugation"), he does not flesh out the details that I am concerned with in this chapter. See Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ʿArabī*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 64-65, 79.

[17] Asín Palacios quoted in Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 234. See Miguel Asín Palacios, *El Islam cristianizado: estudio del "sufismo" a través de las obras de Abenarabi de Murcia* (Madrid: Editorial Plutarco, 1931), 94.

[18] Keller, "Perceptions of Other Religions," 189 (emphasis mine).

[19] Giuseppe Scattolin, "Sufism and Law in Islam: A Text of Ibn 'Arabi (560/1165-638/1240) on 'Protected People' (Ahl al-Dhimma)," *Islamochristiana* 24 (1998), 47, 51.

Although coming from the opposite side of the spectrum from those who offer apologies for Ibn 'Arabi, such readings at bottom carry similar presuppositions of what a "true" mystic should be, i.e., a universalist who celebrates the religious differences of the Other. Indeed, Sufi texts that engender authoritarian and exclusionary attitudes to the religious Other can be difficult for Western audiences (scholarly included) to accept, especially when such discourse comes from so-called "mystics" who are looked upon as enlightened representatives of the Islamic tradition—and even more so in terms of Ibn 'Arabi who has been called "one of the greatest of *all* mystics."[20] Not only does such discourse call into question commonly accepted portrayals of individual Sufis, but it also challenges positions that seek to interpret Sufism, and mysticism more broadly, as "good" religion—i.e., private, psychological, experiential, non-coercive, non-political, non-institutional, universal, etc.[21] Yet, such presuppositions have much more to do with the conceptual categories of religion produced within the socio-historical matrix of Western Christianity, the European Enlightenment, and post-Enlightenment thought than they do with "universal" categories of truth or the views and practice of premodern mystics themselves.[22]

Indeed, as Sherman Jackson notes, the "romantic" idea that what many today in the West identify as "extreme" or "substantively repugnant" religious views held by Muslims as

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[20] Martin Lings, "Preface to the 1978 Edition," in *The Tarjumán al-Ashwáq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, by Muḥuiʾddīn Ibn Al-ʿArabī, trans. and ed. Reynold A. Nicholson (1911; reprint, London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1978), xiii (emphasis mine). Lings goes on to note that Ibn 'Arabi's thought is "basically identical with the Sufi perspective in general […]" (ibid).

[21] For an excellent discussion of the Western conception of "good" religion see Robert A. Orsi**,** *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 177-204.

[22] This idea has perhaps now become a truism in religious studies and has been stated in various ways by many scholars over the past several decades. See for example, Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 2002).

"the exclusive preserve of modern 'fundamentalist' interlopers who are insufficiently trained in or committed to the classical tradition *cannot sustain scrutiny*."[23] Yet, it is important to recall that the so-called Islamic classical tradition is not alone in such a "problematic" history of religious views or practice. The early and medieval Christian tradition has many examples of mystics who believed and acted in ways that are considered morally problematic today. For example, Augustine (d. 430) believed that wars waged against heretics were charitable acts, and Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) and Catherine of Siena (d. 1380) strongly supported the Crusades. Bernard himself is often considered to be the first inquisitor, and Teresa of Ávila (d. 1582) was an advocate of the Inquisition.[24]

Indeed, one of the most forceful insights in the postmodern study of religion is simply that "politics as a category of human endeavor independent of religion is a distinctly modern concept."[25] As Carl Ernst notes:

> Those who consider mysticism a private affair and who view Sufism primarily through poetry or theoretical treatises may feel that military and economic activities do not fit the picture of inner mystical experience. From this point of view, any accommodation with political power constitutes a fall from purity. It is difficult, however, to reconcile such a purely otherworldly perspective with either the history or the teachings of Sufism. […] The prescriptive ethics that are bound up in Sufi rhetoric cannot be put into effect by isolated hermits. *Sufis are constantly reminded of this by the model of the Prophet Muhammad, who plays for them the role of social and political leader as well as mystical exemplar.*[26]

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[23] Sherman A. Jackson, "Islam(s) East and West: Pluralism between No-Frills and Designer Fundamentalism," in *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?*, ed. Mary L. Dudziak (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 123 (emphasis mine).

[24] Richard H. Jones, *Mysticism and Morality: A New Look at Old Questions* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 282, 358.

[25] William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 61. As Cavanaugh notes, this insight was systematically discussed for the first time in the 1962 publication of Wilfred Cantwell Smith's groundbreaking work, *The Meaning and End of Religion*. Ibid.

[26] Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997), 211 (emphasis mine).

Thus, while the presence of communal supremacism in Ibn 'Arabi's discourse counters

commonplace Western readings of Ibn 'Arabi as a model for ecumenical dialogue,[27] it does

not appear to controvert the discursive location of Ibn 'Arabi's lifeworld. As Margaret

Malamud notes:

> the [Sufi] model of dominance and submission that structured relations between masters and
> disciples replicated the way in which power was constructed and dispersed in medieval
> Islamic societies: namely, through multiple dyadic and hierarchical relationships of authority
> and dependence that were continuously dissolved and reformed. This pervasive pattern was
> operative in the spiritual, the political, and the familial realms.[28]

Malamud thus asserts that medieval Sufi discourse and practice affirmed and consecrated

"hierarchy and inequality in the mundane world by connecting them to the divine will and

order."[29] Yet as Ovamir Anjum has recently argued, such hierarchical models found in

Sufism played a critical role in medieval Muslim societies as

> a means of social cohesion and organization. In a social arena in which political (discursive
> or coercive) means of ordering and distribution were lacking, society came to rely on
> authoritarian relationships grounded in esoteric doctrines to discipline and control the desires
> of its subjects.[30]

Indeed, as the seminal historian of Islam Marshall Hodgson theorizes, Ibn 'Arabi's own

conception of spiritual hierarchy and the idea of a cosmic axial saint (*quṭb*) filled the political

gap left by the disintegration of caliphal power beginning in the tenth century: "There might

no longer be a caliph with power in the ordinary political sense. But there remained a true

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[27] E.g., Dom Sylvester Houédard, "Ibn ʿArabi's Contribution to the Wider Ecumenism," in *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi: A Commemorative Volume*, ed. Stephen Hirtenstein and Michael Tiernan, (Shaftesbury: Element Books, 1993), 291-306. See also chapter 2, pp. 94n13 and 119n107 for more recent works that read Ibn 'Arabi in this light.

[28] Margaret Malamud, "Gender and Spiritual Self-Fashioning: The Master-Disciple Relationship in Classical Sufism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 1 (1996): 102.

[29] Ibid., 90.

[30] Ovamir Anjum, "Mystical authority and governmentality in medieval Islam," in *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200–1800*, ed. John Curry and Erik Ohlander (New York: Routledge, 2011), 86.

spiritual caliph, the immediate representative of God, who bore a far more basic sway than any outward caliph."[31] It was thus the authority of such an "invisible caliph" that, according to Hodgson, provided the "personal and social and imaginative complex [that] became the starting point for the creative works in philosophy and literature that Sufism inspired and carried with it throughout Islamdom."[32] Moreover, Hodgson importantly observes that the intellectual traditions of the Middle Periods "were relatively interdependent."[33] As such, the lines between intellectual traditions such as theology (*kalām*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), philosophy (*falsafa*), literature (*adab*), and mysticism (*taṣawwuf*) blurred.[34] Hodgson also importantly points out that the controlling concept that enabled such a diverse intellectual mix to coalesce together was the concept of divine law, i.e., sharia. Indeed, such "Sharî'ah-mindedness" was so central for Hodgson's understanding of the flowering of Islamicate civilization at the end of the eleventh century that he referred to it as "Shar'î supremacy."[35]

It is precisely from within this intellectual predominance of sharia consciousness that Ibn 'Arabi's thought emerges—where not only the lines between the various sciences disappeared, but where all such sciences were embedded within a juridical consciousness that understood history from within an absolutist metanarrative of revelatory events—what

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[31] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 228. As Chodkiewicz notes, Ibn 'Arabi was not the first to think up the idea of a *quṭb* and his attendant spiritual hierarchy, but he was the first to organize such ideas within a coherent doctrine of sainthood (*walāya*). See Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 91-92.

[32] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2, 228-29.

[33] Ibid., 153. Hodgson's Middle Period division follows: the Earlier Middle Period 950-1250 / Later Middle Period 1250-1500 CE. Interestingly, Ibn 'Arabi lived almost halfway in-between.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

Hodgson refers to as a "kerygmatic" mode of piety.[36] Thus, within such a kerygmatic

historical view

> [t]he status of the other prophets could not be denied. But in practice, pious Muslims could not acknowledge that the traditions derived from the moments of revelation granted to those other prophets had more than a limited legal validity as compared with the tradition arising from the revelation to Muḥammad. The others were all quite hopelessly corrupted. […] The messengership of former prophets was but a pale corollary of Muḥammad's […].[37]

Yet, for Hodgson such a "kerygmatic orientation in which the historical development of the

Islamic Ummah played a major role" distinguished itself from what he refers to as "a more

individualistic piety" that "*became frankly mystical* […]."[38] Hodgson continues to note that

such mysticism

> was inspired, above all, by <u>subjective inward awarenesses</u> <u>emerging as the selfhood matured, and the historical, the political role of the Muslim Ummah came to play a minimal role in it</u>. This less historically-oriented Muslim movement was called *Ṣûfism*.[39]

Indeed, according to Hodgson, it was Abū-Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) who assigned

to Sufis "a function in validating a kerygmatic, historical vision *as well as a more properly*

inward mystical role."[40] As will be discusses below, Ghazali served as a precursor for Ibn

'Arabi's cosmography in important ways. Yet, Hodgson held Ibn 'Arabi's hermeneutical

approach to be distinctly non-kerygmatic, i.e., geared towards "the mystical relationship of

the soul to the divine, and particularly with the relationships implied in the term 'love'"

without undue concern for an absolutist Islamic teleological history.[41] Yet, as I will show

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[36] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1, 363.

[37] Ibid., 365-66.

[38] Ibid., 393 (emphasis mine).

[39] Ibid. (underline mine).

[40] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2, 185 (emphasis mine).

[41] Ibid., 242-43.

below, such a kerygmatic perspective, *as well* as Hodgson's idea of "mysticism," is fully present within Ibn ʿArabi's metaphysical cosmology and cosmography.

Even though it is true that Ibn ʿArabi emphatically asserts that his apocalyptic predictions must always be understood in inner, experiential terms, *he never denies their external implications*—rather, quite the opposite.[42] Thus, while Hodgson's insight regarding the Sufi validation of "kerygmatic historical vision" is critically important in terms of situating Ibn ʿArabi's discourse, his reluctance to locate Ibn ʿArabi's "mysticism" within such kerygmatic terms echoes the common Western conceptions of Hodgson's day that privileged "high" mysticism as "*more properly inward*"—i.e., transcendently dissociated from the metanarratives of power found within institutionalized religion.

Omid Safi has recently challenged such constructions of Sufism and the Western tradition of scholarship that has consistently privileged Protestant categories of the "quest for a personal experience of God" over larger social, political, and institutional frameworks of power in medieval Persian Sufism.[43] Here, Sufis

> were intimately involved in the task of using their sanctity to rearrange, improve, challenge, and remain responsible for the affairs of the visible universe. Their social interactions far from nullify their credentials as "mystics" but in fact reinforce their status as holders of both *wilāya* (power and authority) and *walāya* (intimacy with God).[44]

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[42] Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 121-22. See also Gerald T. Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time: Ibn al-ʿArabī's Book of the Fabulous Gryphon* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 5-6, 11.

[43] Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 127. See also Omid Safi, "Bargaining with *Baraka*: Persian Sufism, 'Mysticism,' and Pre-modern Politics," *The Muslim World* 90 (2000): 259-288.

[44] Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge*, 128.

As Safi thus importantly notes, "if our understanding of mysticism is based on a private experience of the Divine held in isolation from a social life, then we are bound to misconstrue the social significance of premodern Muslim mystics."[45]

Thus, while Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysical orientation is certainly conspicuous for its insistence upon the inner (*al-bāṭin*) meanings of external or outward (*al-ẓāhir*) realities,[46] Ibn 'Arabi *also* insists upon the supremacy of the outward over the inward. Thus, in a discussion on the spiritual station of "secret longing" (*al-raghba al-sirrīya*) in his magnum opus, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (The Meccan Openings), Ibn 'Arabi states that "secret longing is connected to the Real (*al-ḥaqq*), and we mean by 'the Real' here what manifests for people in prescribed actions (*al-aʿmāl al-mashrūʿa*)."[47] Here, Ibn 'Arabi suggests that there is a particular manifestation of "the Real" (i.e., God as "Reality" or "Truth") within people who follow the revealed law. Indeed, he goes on to relate that this process of manifestation happens because there is "divine knowledge (*al-maʿārif al-ilāhiyya*) that is contained within the prescribed rulings (*al-aḥkām al-mashrūʿa*), and it is not unveiled (*lā takshifu*) except through the implementation of the rulings themselves."[48] In other words, it is only by obeying the "prescribed rulings" of the sharia that people are able to attain to this particular "divine knowledge." While such an assertion is in itself extremely significant, Ibn 'Arabi's further explanation is even more so. He continues:

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[45] Ibid., xxxi.

[46] For example, in his early treatise *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib*, Ibn 'Arabi states: "When I speak in this book, or in another, of an event in the external world, my intention is simply to establish it firmly in the hearing of the listener and then to set him face to face with that which corresponds to it within man…. Turn your eyes towards your inner kingdom" Ibn 'Arabi quoted in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 122.

[47] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 4, 184 (Fut. II, 533).

[48] Ibid.

This is so since the outwardly manifest (*al-ẓāhir*) is stronger than the inwardly hidden (*al-bāṭin*) by virtue of its greater comprehensiveness; that is, the outwardly manifest relates to the station of both people and the Real, while the inwardly hidden only relates to the station of the Real, not people. At the same time, the Real is not hidden to itself—it is (fully) manifest.[49]

In this passage, Ibn ʿArabi completely inverts the stereotypical idea of "mysticism" itself. Instead of claiming that the esoteric is more important and spiritually significant than the exoteric, he claims the opposite. Here, the most heteronomous conception of piety, i.e., obedience to the exoteric law, is taken to be the most "spiritual" means to God as a door to hidden "divine knowledge" (*al-maʿārif al-ilāhiyya*). Yet, rather than a curious anomaly in Ibn ʿArabi's discourse, such emphasis on the outward *as spiritually more significant* than the inward marks an extremely important element of his metaphysics that is not often fully appreciated. Moreover, this particular inversion paradoxically frames his ideas regarding divine love—what Hodgson above notes as being particularly "inward."

Thus, what is especially significant and nuanced in the passage above is Ibn ʿArabi's inclusion of human beings as an explanation of why the "outwardly manifest" (*al-ẓāhir*) is more comprehensive than the "inwardly hidden" (*al-bāṭin*). As we will see below, this idea relates to the reverence that Ibn ʿArabi gives to the form of the human being as the perfect reflection of God. Indeed, such an idea evokes one of Ibn ʿArabi's favorite sacred traditions (*ḥadīth qudsī*), which he partially recounts in the *Fuṣūṣ* as "I was a hidden (lit. 'unknown' *lam uʿraf*) treasure, so I longed (lit. 'loved' *aḥbabtu*) to be known."[50] Ibn ʿArabi thus states: "If it were not for this love, the world would not have manifested (*ẓahara*) in His essence."[51]

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Abul Ela Affifi (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1966), 203. Although this oft-quoted hadith is considered fabricated, Ibn ʿArabi authenticates it by "unveiling" (*kashf*). See Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 4, 33 (Fut. II, 399).

[51] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 203.

While the doctrinal import of this hadith is one of the most discussed aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics, it is not commonly mentioned in discussions related to the concept of the sharia.[52] Yet, Ibn 'Arabi's above passage on the "station of secret longing" and its attendant idea of the sharia as an "outwardly manifested" (*zāhir*) form of "divine knowledge" (*al-maʿārif al-ilāhiyya*) takes on a particular significance if viewed from within the context of this hadith. Rather than a means of appeasing the ulama, Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysical conception of the sharia—which as we will see, includes a Hodgsonian notion of kerygmatic absolutism—emerges as inherently tied to his metaphysical anthropology and cosmology of love.

While chapter 2 will be concerned, in part, to historicize and flesh out the details of Ibn 'Arabi's "polemical" approach to Judaism and Christianity from within his Andalusian context, in what follows I wish to situate Ibn 'Arabi within his larger Ghazalian discursive milieu. Through close readings and comparative analyses of Ibn 'Arabi's original texts against the current background of universalist claims made by some of his most important Western commentators, this chapter brings into relief the discursive contours of Ibn 'Arabi's supersessionism. The distillation of such contours—which have been largely disregarded, dismissed, or disallowed in contemporary treatments—will set the stage for a revised understanding of Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysical cosmology and cosmography that will serve as a new discursive backdrop for the remainder of this study. By reconfiguring the background in this way, the historically situated presuppositions that have been normalized (and thus *rendered invisible*) around Ibn 'Arabi's Western image will be brought into sharper focus.

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[52] E.g., Reza Shah-Kazemi recently referenced this hadith in an essay on interfaith dialogue. See Reza Shah-Kazemi, "The Metaphysics of Interfaith Dialogue: Sufi Perspectives on the Universality of the Quranic Message," in *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*, ed. James S. Cutsinger. (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002), 153-54.

Interpreting the *Tarjumān*: Ibn 'Arabi's "Religion" and its Muhammadan Triumph

A substantial part of Ibn 'Arabi's Western aura of "enlightened" universalism has

much to do with the first European publication of his *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* (The Interpreter of

Desires), a collection of "mystical odes" translated into English by the British Orientalist

Reynold Nicholson (d. 1945) and published in 1911. It was here that Ibn 'Arabi's most

"celebrated verses" first took on a literary life of their own as a manifesto for the universality

of religious truth within every religion:

> My heart has become capable of every form: it is a
>   pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,
> And a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Kaʿba and the
>   Tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran.
> I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's
>   camels take, that is my religion and my faith.[53]

As Annemarie Schimmel notes, the above lines are quoted by "everyone who tries to

underline the 'mystical ideal of tolerance' and indifference to exterior forms and rituals

[…]."[54] Indeed, Nicholson himself showcases these very same verses on the first page of his

1911 publication, stating: "They express the Ṣúfí doctrine that all ways lead to the One

God"[55] and that for Ibn 'Arabi "*no form of positive religion contains more than a portion of*

the truth."[56] Regarding the same verses in his 1914 work *The Mystics of Islam*, Nicholson

states, "*Love is the essence of all creeds*: the true mystic welcomes it whatever guise it may

assume."[57] Yet, Schimmel disputes such a reading, and instead of "tolerance" finds "a

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[53] Muḥuiʾddīn Ibn Al-ʿArabī, *The Tarjumán al-Ashwáq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, trans. and ed. Reynold A. Nicholson (1911; reprint, London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1978), 67

[54] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 271.

[55] Nicholson, "Preface to the 1911 Edition," in *The Tarjumán al-Ashwáq*, vii.

[56] Ibid., vii (emphasis mine).

[57] Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002), 75 (emphasis mine).

statement about the author's own lofty spiritual rank […]. It is highest self-praise, acknowledgement of an illumination that is far beyond the 'illumination of the names,' but not tolerance preached to the rank and file."[58] Elsewhere, Schimmel notes that not only are these verses not a call for tolerance, but they are "a glowing tribute to Islam."[59]

Yet, Michael Sells forcefully opposes Schimmel's reading of these verses, noting that in an Islamic historical context "tolerance" is really a socio-political term and as such is defined and demarcated by the sharia.[60] As a mystic concerned with "the inner transformation of the individual's heart," Ibn ʿArabi, according to Sells, was not interested in socio-political change.[61] Moreover, such mystical transformation would make the rather "weak" virtue of tolerance irrelevant anyway since "we tolerate those whom we refuse to understand." Rather than a call for toleration, Sells asserts that the *Tarjumān* verses are "*a call for universality*," i.e., "for the complete embracement of *all forms of belief* and manifestation."[62]

Sells also contests Schimmel's claim that in these verses Ibn ʿArabi asserts a mode of Islamic triumphalism. Here, Sells refers to Ibn ʿArabi's own commentary of these verses (translated by Nicholson in the same volume), and notes that he mistranslated the term "Muhammadians" for "Moslems." The Muhammadian, or in what follows "Muhammadan," is a type of saint that specifically inherits from the *logoic* reality of Muhammad, the *ḥaqīqa*

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[58] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 272.

[59] Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1982), 39.

[60] Michael A. Sells, "Ibn ʿArabī's Garden among the Flames: A Reevaluation," *History of Religions* 23, no. 4 (1984): 311-12n37.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

muḥammadiyya.[63] Such a saint is understood by Sells as only peripherally connected to the

formal religion of Islam since "*the term does not refer to Muslims but rather to those who*

have achieved the station of no station and who refuse to bind themselves to any one

prophetic wisdom."[64] Sells concludes:

> The verses are a tribute to the religion of the Muhammadian, the religion of the heart that is receptive of every form. Schimmel, who relies on Nicholson in her interpretation, has mistakenly identified the "religion" referred to in the verses with Islam when, in fact, as is made clear throughout Ibn ʿArabī's writings, very few Muslims are Muhammadians.[65]

Thus according to Sells, Muhammadan saints do not identify with Islam as a

"religion," since their religion is "of the heart," and as quoted above they "*refuse to bind*

themselves to any one prophetic wisdom" and thus embrace "*all forms of belief*." The

argument that Sells makes here draws on his exposition in the same article of Ibn 'Arabi's

discourse on "belief" (*iʿtiqād*) as expressed in the *Fuṣūṣ*. Here, Ibn 'Arabi states: "Whoever

binds Him [in a belief] denies Him in any belief other than that in which he has bound Him.

[…] But whoever liberates Him from binding, denies Him not at all."[66] Thus, Sells's above

contention that the *Tarjumān* verses are "*a call for universality*" rests upon the notion that

Muhammadan saints "*refuse to bind themselves to any one prophetic wisdom*" because they

refuse to "believe" in a particular revealed religion; i.e., their "religion of the heart"

transcends the formal limits of any particular revelation and thus embraces "*all forms of*

belief." As typical in this mode of universalist interpretation, Sells subtly equates "belief"

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[63] Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 72.

[64] Sells, "Ibn ʿArabī's Garden," 311n37 (emphasis mine).

[65] Ibid., 312 (311n37 continued).

[66] Ibn 'Arabi (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 121) quoted in Sells, "Ibn ʿArabī's Garden," 299.

(*iʿtiqād*) with revealed religion. Yet, these two concepts are not analogous in Ibn ʿArabi's thought.

Here it will be helpful to pause and further discuss Ibn ʿArabi's discourse on belief or what he refers to with various terms to mean "the God created in the beliefs" (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq fī al-iʿtiqādāt*) or "the divinity of beliefs (*al-ilāh fī al-iʿtiqādāt*).[67] As one of Ibn ʿArabi's "doctrines" most commonly associated with religious pluralism and universalism, throughout the history of Western scholarship on Ibn ʿArabi there has been a tendency to anachronistically read "the divinity of beliefs" as a doctrine on the "divinity of religions."[68] Its original meaning is most succinctly explained by Ibn ʿArabi himself in the *Futūḥāt*: "The one who reflects (*al-nāẓir*) on God creates in himself, through his reflection, what he believes (*yaʿtaqiduhu*). For he has only worshiped a god he created by his reflection; he said to it 'Be!,' so it was."[69] Yet, this projected "creation" of the believer, although limited and incomplete, *is not altogether unreal*, for it is through the believer's particular conception of God that God discloses Himself—what Ibn ʿArabi calls "divine theophany in the form of beliefs" (*al-tajallī al-ilāhiyya fī ṣurat al-iʿtiqādāt*).[70]

Ibn ʿArabi's deployment of "belief" (*iʿtiqād*)—as derived from the root *ʿ-q-d* denoting a "knot"—is used in such discourse to describe how *rational convictions*, as mental

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[67] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 178, 113; and also: *al-ilāh al-muʿtaqad* (ibid., 225).

[68] This reading appears to have begun with implications made by Affifi, and more specifically suggested by Corbin as the "God created in the faiths" (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq fī al-iʿtiqādāt*) and in Izutsu as an outright substitution of "belief(s)" (*iʿtiqād/iʿtiqādāt*) for "religion(s)." See Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy*, 151; Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ʿArabī*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) [first published 1958], 124, 195-200, 268, 269; and Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 129, 254.

[69] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 7, 162-63. (Fut. IV, 143).

[70] Ibid., vol. 3, 361 (Fut. II, 311).

"knots," construct a "believer's" experience or perception of God.[71] Although Ibn ʿArabi's

discourse on belief is commonly taken as a pluralist discourse on "religion," he importantly

does not include other religious communities in his expositions of this idea. In fact, this

discourse points to an exclusory foundation.

As mentioned above, Ibn ʿArabi refers to the "the divinity of beliefs" as the "*divine

theophany in the form of beliefs.*" This phenomena is repeatedly described by Ibn ʿArabi in

partial narrations of what he refers to as the "hadith of theophany" (*ḥadīth al-tajallī*), where

on the Day of Resurrection God manifests Himself to those who worshiped Him in various

forms in which He is either recognized or denied, thus evincing the notion that God is only

acknowledged in the particular forms of belief that people hold of Him and denied in forms

outside of their belief. A critical aspect of this hadith that has not been discussed in the

context of Ibn ʿArabi, however, is that it begins by recapitulating Qurʾan 9:30 and thus

narrates that both "the Jews" and "the Christians" are summoned before God and asked what

it was that they had worshiped, in which they respond "ʿUzair" and "the Messiah"

respectively, both groups claiming each as the "son of God." In the hadith, God then calls

them liars, and they are thrown into the Fire of Hell. Indeed, it is only those who "worshiped

God, the righteous and the wicked" who remain to witness the various theophanies of God,

accepting and denying them.[72]

After a detailed discussion on divine theophany (*al-tajallī al-ilāhiyya*) in the *Futūḥāt*,

Ibn ʿArabi quotes the above "hadith of theophany" *in its entirety* without any comment or

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[71] While Ibn ʿArabi's discourse on belief retains its theological underpinnings of the term *iʿtiqād* in relation to its derivation of *aqīda* (meaning tenet or article of belief), it is strongly tied to its philosophical usage of "convictions rationally acquired" as used in *Kitāb al-Amānāt wa'l-iʿtiqādāt* of the Jewish theologian Saʿadyā Gaon (d. 942). See L. Gardet, "Iʿtiḳād," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 279.

[72] Muslim, *al-Īmān*, 352.

qualification regarding its reference to Qur'an 9:30 and its subsequent consignment of the

People of the Book to Hell.[73] Even though "the Jews" and "the Christians" are presumably a

synecdoche in this hadith for those particular people of the People of the Book who

worshiped false gods, Ibn ʿArabi's tacit acceptance of its polemic evinces how his discourse

is circumscribed within the theological boundaries of its foundational tradition. Moreover, as

I will discuss below, it is in allusion to this very Qur'anic polemic that Ibn ʿArabi chastises

the Jews and the Christians in the *Futūḥāt*. It is the presence of such criticism of the People

of the Book in Ibn ʿArabi's discourse that makes the attribution of religious pluralism to his

thought more problematic than is commonly acknowledged.

Rather than mentioning other religious communities, when Ibn ʿArabi invokes the

discourse on belief he repeatedly mentions scholastic theological positions, like those of the

Ashʿarīs and Muʿtazilīs, as competing rational discourses that limit a limitless God.[74] To take

only one example, in the *Futūḥāt* Ibn ʿArabi invokes the "hadith of theophany" mentioned

above and states:

> Every faction (*ṭāʾifa*) has believed something concerning God. If He manifests (*tajallā*)
> Himself to them differently, they reject Him. But when he has transmuted (*taḥawwala*)
> Himself in the distinguishing characteristic that this faction has ascribed to God in
> themselves, then they recognize Him. For example, when He manifests to the Ashʿarī in the
> form of belief (*ṣūrat iʿtiqād*) of a rival whose conviction about God is different than his and

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[73] See Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 5, 52-53 (Fut. III, 44-45).

[74] When mentioned in Ibn ʿArabi's discussions on belief, the Ashʿarīs and Muʿtazilīs are symbolic of two opposing positions regarding the nature of God: "similarity," or anthropomorphism, (*tashbīh*) and "incomparability," or transcendence, (*tanzīh*) respectively. While each group tends to emphasize one of these positions regarding God's nature over the other, Ibn ʿArabi insists that both aspects are true. E.g., see Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 123; *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 3, 135, 371 (Fut. II, 116, 319); ibid., vol. 6, 103 (Fut. III, 384). Compared to the lengthy literature perpetuating the universalist appropriation of Ibn ʿArabi's discourse on belief, this point has not been given its due. For a non-universalist treatment of this topic as intra-religious critique see Alexander Knysh, "'Orthodoxy' and 'Heresy' in Medieval Islam: An Essay in Reassessment," *The Muslim World* 83, no. 1 (1993): 58-59; and Ian Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction: A Comparative Study of Derrida and Ibn ʿArabi* (London: Routledge, 2004), 15-20.

likewise He manifests to the Ashʿarī's rival in the form of belief of the Ashʿarī, then each one of the two factions will reject Him. And it is thus with all factions.[75]

Ibn ʿArabi's discourse on belief thus appears to be an *intra*-religious critique on speculative theology (*kalām*) and the metaphysical hazards of rational conceptions of the divine more broadly. The basis of this idea, like much of Ibn ʿArabi's thought, seems to have been prefigured by Ghazali, who referred to untying "the knot of beliefs" (*ʿuqdat al-iʿtiqādāt*) as a means to attaining experiential knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of the outward tenets of faith.[76]

Yet, as mentioned above, Ibn ʿArabi does positively acknowledge "beliefs" as constructive since within his monistic economy, such conceptions are partial reflections of divine reality. Thus in the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn ʿArabi famously states that "there are only beliefs and all are correct (*muṣīb*)," and similarly, if a person truly "understood al-Junayd when he said 'the color of water is the color of its vessel,' then he would grant every believer their belief and perceive God in every form and every belief."[77] From just these examples it becomes apparent how easily such statements can be read within the context of religious pluralism. To categorize Ibn ʿArabi's discourse in universalist terms, however, assumes that he defines "religion" in the same way that it has come to be construed in the modern West, i.e., as "a set of beliefs to be confessed."[78] Yet, Ibn ʿArabi's discourse does not present "religion" (*dīn*) as a set of beliefs; rather, he defines *dīn* more in alignment with premodern conceptions of

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[75] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 321 (Fut. I, 266).

[76] Ghazālī additionally notes that only through assiduous religious observance and remembrance of God (*dhikr*) is such "untying" accomplished. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna al-islām wa al-zandaqa* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr al-Lubnani, 1993), 79-80.

[77] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 114, 226.

[78] Cavanaugh, *The Myth*, 73.

religion as "obedience" (*inqiyād*).[79] Thus, at the start of the chapter on the prophet Jacob in

the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn ʿArabi states:

> Religion (*al-dīn*) is equivalent to your obedience (*inqiyādika*), and that which is from God, Most High, is the revealed law (*al-sharʿ*) to which you are obedient. So religion is obedience (*al-inqiyād*), and the Law (*al-nāmūs*) is the revealed way (*al-sharʿ*)[80] that God, Most High, has prescribed (*sharʿa*).[81]

While the definition of *dīn* as obedience follows a normative Ashʿarī position,[82] Ibn

ʿArabi's interpretation of the ontological nature of obedience is decidedly less so. Here, Ibn

ʿArabi categorically states that "The divine command (*al-amr*) demands obedience."[83] This is

a comprehensive statement that summarizes the divine-human relationship. Because Ibn

ʿArabi assumes that the command of God is absolute, regardless of whether the human being

obeys or transgresses the command, both responses are submission to God—which according

to Ibn ʿArabi is analogous to "obedience"[84]—either in what pleases or displeases God as

necessarily determined by His "rulings" (*al-aḥkām*) in the sharia.[85] On the outward (*ẓāhir*)

level, if a person "submits" to God in what is not pleasing, then God either responds by

pardoning or sanctioning them. Thus, in all cases, God "obeys" the actions of the person by

rewarding, pardoning, or punishing.[86] From a deeper level—i.e., the "secret" (*sirr*) or "inner"

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[79] Such a definition parallels the original Latin term *religio* and its notion of being bound (from *religare*) to God in terms of obligation or duty. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 20, 102, 204n5.

[80] This translation of *sharʿ* is not without precedent in the *Fuṣūṣ*, as in the chapter of Moses where Ibn ʿArabi specifically glosses *shirʿa* as "way" (*ṭarīqa*). See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 201.

[81] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 94

[82] See Louis Gardet, "Dīn," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 294.

[83] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 95.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., 96.

[86] Ibid.

(*bāṭin*) perspective—Ibn ʿArabi states that it is the essences (*dhawāt*) of human beings that determine whether they obey or transgress, not God.[87] From this theodicean viewpoint, God is entirely passive. In his typical discursive style, Ibn ʿArabi takes this path to its "logical" monistic conclusion and "the secret that is even beyond this": since contingent beings are non-existent in the first place, "there is no existence except the existence of the Real […]."[88] In other words, it is only God who obeys/transgresses and rewards/pardons/punishes.

The important point in all of this is that, for Ibn ʿArabi, the lynchpin that keeps all of these shifting relationships in play within the context of earthly existence is the sharia where the nexus of divine rulings (*al-aḥkām*) are located for each prophetic dispensation. As Ibn ʿArabi specifically states here: "The servant institutes religion, while the Real puts into place the rulings (*al-aḥkām*)."[89] As such, the idea of religion in Ibn ʿArabi's discourse has very little to do with "belief" and much more to do with law. Indeed, this explains why Ibn ʿArabi prefers to refer to religion in the plural as "laws" (*sharāʾiʿ*), as opposed to "religions" (*adyān*), since it is the actual set of rulings that change with each prophetic dispensation that serves as the criteria from which "obedience" can be assessed within any given community.[90] As we will see below, because Ibn ʿArabi views the dispensation of Muhammad as a "universal messengership" (*ʿumūm risāla*), he views its attendant divine law as abrogative and thus controlling in a totalizing manner.

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[87] Here "essence" (*dhāt*) is analogous to the "immutable essence" (*ʿayn thābita*) of each person, which according to Ibn ʿArabi is in relationship with God as a distinct intelligible entity or form (*ṣūra*) within God's knowledge. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 96.

[88] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 96.

[89] Ibid.

[90] In the *Futūḥāt* Ibn ʿArabi only uses *adyān* to refer to religions in the plural in one passage; see p. 79 below.

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Returning now to Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on belief, in the *Futūḥāt* he notes that only a person with "perfect composition" (*al-kāmal al-mizāj*) encompasses all beliefs.[91] As I will discuss in more detail momentarily, the idea of "perfection" (*kāmal*) here is tied to the Prophet Muhammad as the locus for all of the divine names. Yet importantly, in Sells's above treatment he decenters the Prophet's position as such a locus. He states: "Ibn ʿArabī *deconstructs the entire Sufi hierarchy* by speaking of a Muhammadian pole (a pole modeled on the Muhammadian *rūḥ* or spirit-logos), the pole of transformation, the station that is no station."[92] Yet, Ibn 'Arabi's idea of the Muhammadan pole, and its attendant "station of no station," is far removed from a deconstruction of "*the entire Sufi hierarchy*." Rather, it is the apex of all hierarchies of creation and thus *the subsumption* of all stations. This point is crucial in understanding Sells's above slide from Ibn 'Arabi's embrace of all "beliefs" to an embrace of "religions" in the modern sense. Such an anachronistic drift not only connotes religions as sets of beliefs, but it also assumes a modern egalitarianism—i.e., all the religions are equally "deconstructed" and relativized within an underlying religious core beyond any particular form. Yet, this could not be farther from Ibn 'Arabi's totalizing conception of the "religions" and Muhammad's place in relation to them. Not only does Ibn 'Arabi hold that the cosmic modality of the Prophet subsumes all of the other prophets and their religious laws, but he is their original ontological source. In other words, all of the prophets are contained within Muhammad, who is their perfected sovereign and whose religious law they must follow.

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[91] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 3, 256 (Fut. II, 219-20).

[92] Sells, "Ibn ʿArabī's Garden," 304.

This idea is clearly presented in Ibn 'Arabi's commentary on his famous verses quoted above from the *Tarjumān*. After noting that "I follow the religion of Love" refers to the Qur'anic verse "*Say: If you love God, follow me, then God will love you*" (3:31)—a verse the classical exegetes variously understood as depicting an instance where Muhammad invited either a group of idolaters, Jews, or Christians to Islam[93]—Ibn 'Arabi states that the verse "whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith" means (here translated by Nicholson):

> 'I accept willingly and gladly whatever burden He lays upon me. No religion is more sublime than a religion based on love and longing for Him whom I worship and in whom I have faith'. This is a peculiar prerogative of Moslems, for the station of perfect love is appropriated to Muḥammad beyond any other prophet, since God took him as His beloved.[94]

The word Nicholson translates as "Moslems" is as Sells rightly notes the "Muhammadans" (*al-muḥammadiyyīn*). Yet, Nicholson does not translate the entire passage, as was his method for Ibn 'Arabi's commentary.[95] Most critically, he leaves out the larger part of Ibn 'Arabi's description of Muhammad, which states:

> And this is a special prerogative for the Muhammadans—for indeed Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, is alone from among all of the prophets in the station of perfect love. He is pure (*ṣafī*), delivered (*najī*), and a friend (*khalīl*), as well as all of the other meanings (*maʿānī*) of the stations of the prophets; yet, he is beyond all of them. Indeed, God took him as a darling (*ḥabīb*), that is, (both) lover (*muḥibb*) and beloved (*maḥbūb*), and the inheritor of His way.[96]

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[93] 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāhidī (d. 1075) states in his *Asbāb al-nuzūl* (Occasions of Revelation) that Ibn ʿAbbas reported that this verse was revealed when Muhammad witnessed some of the Quraysh worshiping idols in the Kaaba and called on them to follow him instead. al-Wāhidī also narrates another report from Ibn ʿAbbas that this verse was revealed to the Jews, while he finally states that ibn Isḥaq reported from a different source that it was addressed to the Christians. See ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāhidī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl* (Dammam: Dar al-Islah, 1992), 103-4. As a "traditional" scholar with formidable training and transmission in hadith and tafsir, Ibn 'Arabi was certainly aware of these traditions, and it's clear he is making an allusion to them through his commentary on this verse via the previous two famous verses that reveal his "heart capable of every form" including the sites of worship for idolaters, Jews, and Christians. See Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 97-98.

[94] Ibn ʿArabī, *The Tarjumán al-Ashwá*q, 69.

[95] Nicholson notes, "The English version of the commentary is usually very much abridged, but I have rendered the interesting and important passages nearly word for word." *The Tarjumán al-Ashwáq*, 9.

[96] Ibn ʿArabī, *Dhakhāʾir al-aʿlāq*, ed. Muhammad al-Kurdi (Cairo, 1968), 50-51.

Besides the unsurprising connection between the Muhammadan saints and

Muhammad, Ibn 'Arabi notes here that Muhammad has achieved a unique perfection out of

all the prophets in the station of love as one who is "pure (*ṣafī*), delivered (*najī*), and a friend

(*khalīl*), as well as all of the other meanings of the stations of the prophets." These three

qualities directly relate to traditional attributes used in association with Adam, Moses, and

Abraham respectively—what Ibn 'Arabi refers to as "meanings" (*maʿānī*).[97] As such,

Muhammad is presented here as the embodiment of all of the prophetic meanings, or

attributes, that were manifested in the prophets before him. Such a concept, moreover, is a

seminal and recurring one in Ibn 'Arabi's discourse. Thus early on in the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn 'Arabi

explains how the spiritual "reality" of Muhammad (i.e., the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*) serves as

the source of knowledge for all the prophets and Muhammad's abiding prophetic existence:

> Every single prophet from Adam to the Final Prophet takes only from the niche of the Seal of
> the Prophets (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*), even though his physical existence comes last—indeed, by
> his own reality he is (abidingly) existent—as his words relate: "I was a prophet when Adam
> was between water and clay."[98]

Indeed, each of the twenty seven chapters of the *Fuṣūṣ* is named according to a specific

divine "wisdom" (*ḥikma*) that is related to a "word" (*kalima*) of God manifested by a

particular prophet who therefore is understood to manifest an aspect of the Muhammadan

Reality. As the "Seal of the Prophets" Muhammad is for Ibn 'Arabi the fulfillment or locus

of manifestation of all of the divine names, thereby forming the archetype of the "Perfect

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[97] These are reported in a hadith in Tirmidhī, *al-Manāqib*, 1.

[98] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 63-64. For a discussion of the authenticity of this hadith and Ibn 'Arabi's
usage of it see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 60-61.

Human Being" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) whose physical manifestation is cosmographically situated as the spiritual "pole" or "axis" (*quṭb*) of the universe.[99]

The cosmogonic role of the Muhammadan Reality as analogous to the Hellenic concept of the "Word" or *Logos* was systematically treated in a seminal 1939 study by A. E. Affifi, who called Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics "the first Muslim Logos-doctrine."[100] While Affifi maintains that Ibn 'Arabi's *logoic* conception of the Muhammadan Reality as the generative and rational cosmic principle of the universe is distinguishable from the historical Prophet,[101] such differentiations are not always so clear-cut within Ibn 'Arabi's discourse itself.

Indeed, in the *Futūḥāt* Ibn 'Arabi interweaves the historical and *logoic* realities of Muhammad together within the *logoic* matrix of the Qur'an itself by enunciating three specific points: (i) the report of the Prophet's wife 'A'isha that Muhammad was "the character of the Qur'an" (*kāna khulquhu al-qurʾān*), (ii) the Qur'anic verses that call both the character of the Prophet and the Qur'an "tremendous" (*ʿaẓīm*),[102] and (iii) the theological tenet that the Qur'an, as the speech of God (*kalām allāh*), is one of God's attributes.[103] Thus, elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt* Ibn 'Arabi asserts that because Muhammad is the corporal location of Qur'anic manifestation, he is the enlightened embodiment of all scriptural knowledge:

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[99] See Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 71, and Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy*, 71-73.

[100] Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy,* 86. For a contextualization of this doctrine in terms of Avicennan ontology and its conceptual evolution in Ibn 'Arabi's later school see G. A. Lipton, *"The Equivalence" (Al-Taswiya) of Muhibb Allah Ilahabadi: Avicennan Neoplatonism and the School of Ibn 'Arabi in South Asia* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009), 36-48.

[101] Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy*, 70, 72.

[102] I.e., Qur'an 68:4, 15:87.

[103] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 7, 68-69 (Fut. IV, 60-61). Qur'an 4:80.

The Qur'an unveils all of the sciences contained within the revealed books, while it (also) contains what is not in them. So he who was given the Qur'an has been given complete enlightenment (*al-ḍiyāʾ al-kāmil*) that includes every knowledge, as the Most High stated: "*We have not neglected a thing in the Book*."[104] And it is a Mighty Qur'an that "*no falsehood approaches it from the fore or behind*."[105] Hence by it, it is true that Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, possesses "the comprehensive words" (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*).[106]

Since the Qur'an *qua* God's uncreated speech is itself "comprehensive," it contains all knowledge, including but not limited to that contained within all past revelations.[107] Moreover, since Muhammad was given the Qur'an, he too has such "comprehensive" knowledge and possesses the *logoic* "comprehensive words" (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*), signifying the perfected knowledge of the Muhammadan Reality as the locus of the divine names.[108] Indeed, Ibn ʿArabi further blurs the boundaries between the Qur'an as an attribute of God and the person of Muhammad by stating "Muhammad was an attribute of the Real (*al-ḥaqq*), most high, in his totality, '*so whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed God*' [Qur'an 4:80]."[109]

In Ibn ʿArabi's metaphysical anthropology and cosmology, it is precisely such indeterminacy between the divine and its *logoic* Muhammadan "reflection" that forms the fulcrum around which the idea of the Perfect Human Being pivots. In his recent work *Sufi*

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[104] Qur'an 6:38.

[105] Qur'an 41:42.

[106] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 3, 126 (Fut. II, 107).

[107] Regarding the Ḥanbalī (and qualified Ashʿarī) conception of the Qur'an as equivalent to the attribute of God's speech, see Nader El-Bizri, "God: Essence and Attributes," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 122-131.

[108] Classically understood in the sense of an *extraordinary succinctness with the widest possible meaning*, this phrase comes from the hadith narrated by Abu Huraira "I was sent with *jawāmiʿ al-kalim*" (Bukhārī, *al-Taʿbīr*, 32; see also Bukhārī, *al-Iʿtiṣām*, 6). As James Morris notes, this hadith "is cited repeated by Ibn 'Arabî to summarize the totality of spiritual knowledge or divine 'forms of wisdom' (*hikam*) making up the 'Muhammadan Reality' […]." James W. Morris, "Ibn 'Arabî's Spiritual Ascension," in *The Meccan Revelations*, vol. 1, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz (New York: Pir Press, 2002), 352n188.

[109] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 7, 69 (Fut. IV, 61).

Aesthetics, Cyrus Ali Zargar compellingly argues that Ibn 'Arabi's "religion of love" (*dīn al-ḥubb*) has close parallels to the Persian "School of Passionate Love," i.e., the *madhhab-i 'ishq*, which emphasized the contemplation of God through the "witnessing" (*shuhūd*) of the human form, i.e., *shāhid bāzī*.[110] As Zargar notes, according to Ibn 'Arabi "the greatest witnessing of existence is that which is most comprehensive."[111] Indeed, in his discussion on Adam in the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn 'Arabi establishes that the human being is superior to all created things in comprehensiveness, and thus "serves as the supreme mirror in which God witnesses himself […]."[112] As Ibn 'Arabi notes in the *Fuṣūṣ* above, it is Muhammad who is the "Seal of the Prophets" and thus the perfect locus of the divine names and most complete reflection of God. In other words, he is *the most comprehensive of all human beings*.[113]

Just as Ibn 'Arabi acknowledges this position of comprehensiveness within Muhammad as the "Seal of the Prophets," he famously situates himself as the "Seal of the Saints" (*khātam al-awliyā'*), i.e., the supreme "spiritual" manifestation of the Muhammadan

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[110] Zargar notes that while Ibn 'Arabi clearly categorized the female form as the most perfect locus of divine beauty, he did indeed approve of the famous practice of gazing on "beardless youths" or in Ibn 'Arabi's terminology "recent ones" (*al-aḥdāth*)—as "fresh from their lord"—for "the accomplished gnostic." Thus, as Ibn 'Arabi states: "In their companionship is a recollection of their newness by which one discerns his eternalness—may he be exalted." Yet, Ibn 'Arabi does note that in terms of "novice wayfarers [*al-muridun*] and Sufis [*al-sufiyah*], the companionship of recent ones is forbidden to them, because of the predominance of animal desire in them." Cyrus Ali Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn 'Arabi and 'Iraqi* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 73-74. Although Claude Addas records Ibn 'Arabi's stern prohibition of the practice for "Sufis" (along with *samā'*), she interestingly notes elsewhere that Ibn 'Arabi entrusted the advanced spiritual education of his own stepson and disciple, Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnāwī (d. 1274), to Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. 1238). Significantly, Ibn 'Arabi was aware that Kirmānī was affiliated with the school of Aḥmad Ghazālī and the practice of both *samā'* and *shāhid bāzī*. As Addas notes, "doubtless, he, like Jāmī, considered that in the case of Awḥad al-Dīn it was a question of a genuine mode of spiritual realization." Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 163-64, 229.

[111] Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 71.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.

Reality *qua* the highest Muhammadan saint.[114] Thus, directly after the passage quoted from the *Fuṣūṣ* above that identifies Muhammad as "the niche" from which all the prophets derive their knowledge, Ibn 'Arabi states that the Seal of the Saints was likewise "a saint while Adam was between water and clay."[115] As such, Ibn 'Arabi notes that the Seal of the Saints "takes from the Origin and is *the witness* (*al-mushāhid*) of all degrees (of reality)."[116]

It is precisely from this sense of witnessing divine theophanies and thus "containing" the *logoic* meanings—i.e., the above mentioned "comprehensive words" (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*) of Muhammad as a manifestation of "the speech of God" (*kalām allāh*)—that Ibn 'Arabi's *Tarjumān* verses above should be understood. When Ibn 'Arabi claims that his heart is "capable of every form" (*qābilan kull ṣūra*) like "the Tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran," he thus asserts that as the Seal of the Saints he is like Muhammad in his comprehensive capacity to witness all of the names, meanings, and forms that make up the "form" (*ṣūra*) of the divine itself.[117]

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[114] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 64. See also Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 170, 128-146, passim.

[115] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 64.

[116] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 64. Ibn 'Arabi is often criticized for ranking the perfected saint over that of the prophet. While this position is often explained away as simply Ibn 'Arabi's assertion that sainthood (*walāya*) as conceived of here is simply the hidden (and divine) attribute of outward prophethood (*nubuwwa*), and as such Muhammad is himself the "real" Seal of Sainthood. Yet, according to Ibn 'Arabi, since he is the historical Seal of Sainthood, when Jesus descends he will be under the "authority" of Ibn 'Arabi himself. See Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 125.

[117] The idea that the human being was created by God as the comprehensive configuration of the divine names—and thus reflective of God's "form"—in order for God to witness Himself is the initial subject of Ibn 'Arabi's first chapter of Adam in the *Fuṣūṣ*. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 48-50. As Zargar notes, according to Ibn 'Arabi "the gnostic heart, on account of the superiority of human knowledge and the comprehensiveness of human existence, is transformed to reflect the divine self-disclosures in a manner more accurate than the cosmos." Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 35. See also Zargar's specific discussion of Adam in terms of Ibn 'Arabi's concept above in the *Fuṣūṣ* (ibid., 71-72, 183n50).

As such, Ibn ʿArabi often refers to the hadith: "God created Adam in His form (*ṣūratihi*)."[118] Indeed, after invoking this hadith in his treatise *al-Tanazzulāt al-mawṣiliyya* (Angelic Descents of Mosul), Ibn ʿArabi enunciates strikingly similar verses to those of the *Tarjumān* above. Thus, in a chapter regarding the obligation of ritual purification for prayer, and the use of water for it, Ibn ʿArabi states:

> God created (*faṭara*) my form (*ṣūratī*) upon his,
> > *so I am every form.*
> God put in me his command until
> > I became what is in-between his origin and form.
> In my outward (*ẓāhirī*) there is distress and punishment
> > Yet, in my inward (*bāṭinī*) there is hidden mercy.
> *I contain His Torah and His Gospels*
> > *His Qurʾan and His Psalms.*[119]

As in the *Tarjumān* where Ibn ʿArabi claims that his "heart has become capable of every form," here too he is all forms. Yet in the *Tanazzulāt* verses, Ibn ʿArabi makes a distinction between his outward (*ẓāhir*) and inward (*bāṭin*) states; externally he suffers, but internally he contains the wisdom of all of God's revelations. Ibn ʿArabi thus claims: "I am everything with Him!"[120] Indeed, he goes even further: "When I claim that I am a lord (*rabb*), God lets down (*asdala*) his veils (*sutūrahu*) over my face!"[121] But then, he immediately adds:

> Yet, His law (*sharʿuhu*) comes and addresses my very essence (*dhātī*),
> > Oh heedless one, you have been ignorant of His commands!
> God has made obligatory grace and punishment,
> > according to the outward actions of humanity.[122]

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[118] E.g., Bukhārī, *al-Istiʾdhān*, 1.

[119] Ibn ʿArabī, *Tanazzul al-amlāk min ʿālam al-arwāḥ ilā ʿālam al-aflāk* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1961), 61.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid. Here, Ibn ʿArabi alludes to the idea of "infidelity" (*kufr*) in the positive sense of "covering," although he does not specifically use the term *kafara*. See discussion of the "people of blame" (*malāmiyya*) and their "infidelity" on p. 63 below.

[122] Ibn ʿArabī, *Tanazzul al-amlāk*, 61.

It is this dialectical tension between ecstasy and sobriety, immanence and transcendence, that indelibly marks Ibn ʿArabi's thought. Yet, Ibn ʿArabi is no Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922), who ultimately was unable to reconcile between the theophanic self-identification of lordship and the outward sharia. As Ernst notes, "Hallajian infidelity" was marked by the insistence on the "full application of legal discrimination on the social level; anyone who follows the path taken by Hallaj must himself be prepared to accept the legal consequences."[123] Thus, Hallaj's "self-blame and desire for martyrdom" was the result of an apparent incongruence between ultimate reality (ḥaqīqa) and the sharia.[124] In the section of the *Tanazzulāt* above, however, Ibn ʿArabi seeks to balance the "infidelity" of ḥaqīqa alongside of the law within a dyadic tension.[125] Yet even more boldly, Ibn ʿArabi claims that for attained mystics like himself, there is in reality no such tension; i.e., such theophanic self-witnessing is completely within the bounds of the law. He states:

> If someone like me says "I am a lord,"
>> Oh my friend—is that a major sin (*kabīra*)?
> No, it is my right, for I and He are one!
>> I did not even commit a minor sin (*ṣaghīra*).
> How can I commit a minor or major sin,
>> when I am holy (*al-quds*) and possessor of exaltation (*al-ʿlā*) and sovereignty (*al-sarīr*)?[126]

Indeed, in one of his two ascension narratives contained in the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn ʿArabi offers an account of his attainment of the "Muhammadan Station" (*muḥammadī al-maqām*). After spiritually recapitulating Muhammad's famous "nocturnal voyage" (*isrāʾ*) and

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[123] Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 71.

[124] Ibid.

[125] As Ibn ʿArabi says in the *Futūḥāt*, "The essence of the sharia is the essence of ultimate reality (*al-ḥaqīqa*)" and "the sharia is itself ultimate reality." Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 4, 219 (Fut. II, 563).

[126] Ibn ʿArabī, *Tanazzul al-amlāk*, 62.

heavenly ascension (*miʿrāj*) through the seven heavens, Ibn ʿArabi arrives at "*the Lote-Tree of the furthest boundary*" (*sidrat al-muntahā*) (Qur'an 53:14), where the Qur'an claims that Muhammad himself attained to the presence of God. Here, Ibn ʿArabi states that God "sent down" (*anzala*) upon him, in revelatory fashion, verse 3:84 of the Qur'an:

> *Say: we have faith in God and what has been sent down upon us, and in what was sent down upon Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob, and the tribes (of Israel), and in what was given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord; we do not distinguish between any of them, and to Him we surrender.*

Ibn ʿArabi then immediately asserts:

> So in this verse, He gave me all of the verses and brought the affair home to me, and He made this verse the key to all knowledge for me. Thus, I knew that *I am the totality of those* (prophets) who were mentioned to me (*majmūʿ man dhukira lī*). By this, the good news came to me that I had attained to the Muhammadan Station (*muḥammadī al-maqām*) and was among the heirs of the comprehensiveness of Muhammad (*jamʿīat muḥammad*), may God bless him and grant him peace.[127]

Thus, like his assertions in the *Tarjumān* and the *Tanazzulat* above, Ibn ʿArabi here claims to have attained to the Muhammadan comprehensiveness and the subsumption of all of the previous prophets and *the totality* of their knowledge.

Similarly, in the prologue to the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn ʿArabi relates another visionary attainment of the "purest Muhammadan station" (*al-maqām al-muḥammadī al-aṭhar*),[128] where he states that at that time he was granted "the gifts of wisdom" (*mawāhib al-ḥikam*) and that which resembled "the comprehensive words" (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*).[129] But what is more, in this account Ibn ʿArabi states that as the heir to this station: "*the Real sent him to protect the sanctity of the divine law* (al-sharīʿa)."[130] Thus, in his assumed role of the Seal of

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[127] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 6, 65 (Fut. III, 350).

[128] Ibid., vol. 1, 16 (Fut. I, 3).

[129] Ibid.

[130] Ibid.

the Saints, Ibn ʿArabi saw himself as heir not only to the perfection of the Muhammadan comprehensive wisdom, i.e., all of the prophetic words/meanings, but also *as the protector of the law* in its outward, communal, and supersessional sense. In other words, as the Seal of the Saints who had attained to the highest Muhammadan Station Ibn ʿArabi saw himself as heir to the Muhammadan roles of *both* saint and prophet.[131]

It is such a clear embrace of the Muhammadan role of "lawgiver," *in addition to saint*, that Sells neglects to acknowledge above when he suggests that Ibn ʿArabi's verses in the *Tarjumān* are an illustration of the path of "the Muhammadan" as somehow dissociated from the juridico-religious and socio-communal aspect of Islam. It is true that in the *Futūḥāt* Ibn ʿArabi mentions the ability of Muhammadan saint—who is "without qualification" (i.e., who has attained what Sells refers to as "the station of no station")—to call to God through all of the prophetic "languages" *in toto*, as opposed to prophetic messengers (*rusul*) who are bound only to that with which they have been sent.[132] Yet, such Muhammadan polyglotism is for Ibn ʿArabi simply a *reflection* of Muhammad's prophetic comprehensiveness and, as will be shown below, his "universal message" directed to all of humanity.[133] It does not mean, however, that such Muhammadan saints are beyond all religions—and thus beyond religious law and *its attendant absolutism*—since Ibn ʿArabi categorically states that they are bound to the prescriptions of the Muhammadan sharia. He thus adds:

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[131] In the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn ʿArabi states that sainthood (*walāya*) is the domain of "general prophethood" (*nubuwwa ʿāmma*), even though "law-giving prophethood" (*nubūwat al-tashrīʿ*) came to an end at the death of Muhammad. Yet, such "law-giving" continues through legal reasoning (*al-ijtihād*). According to Ibn ʿArabi, this is the meaning of the hadith: "The ulama are the inheritors of the prophets" (e.g., Bukhārī, *al-ʿIlm*, 10). See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 134-35.

[132] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 5, 192. (Fut. III, 167).

[133] I.e., as opposed to the previous prophets who were sent to specific communities in particular times (*al-azmān*). See Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 320 (Fut. I, 265).

The Muhammadan saint keeps to a specific revelation (*waḥy khāṣṣ*) <u>only in the ruling of what is permissible and forbidden</u> (*al-ḥukm bi al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥurma*). As for his summoning in terms of what there is silence about or what there has been nothing revealed in the revelation of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, admonishing him to leave it, then he does not leave it if it has been revealed to any of the prophets, upon them be peace.[134]

In light of this passage directly prescribing the rulings of Muhammad's sharia upon the Muhammadan saint, Sells's above claim that the *Tarjumān* verses "are a tribute to the religion of the Muhammadian" as "*a call for universality*" (and thus somehow distinct from Islam as a formal "religion") is strongly misleading. Thus, Sells notes at the end of his essay:

I suggest that the theory of the heart that is receptive of every form may offer insight into a methodology of comparative study. Ibn ʿArabī's discussion of the "gods of belief" *is based on a logic which sees unity and difference not as mutually exclusive but as dialectically reinforcing*. Such a dialectic may offer a richer mode of inquiry than the present argument about *whether or not religions* or mystical experiences are essentially the same or essentially different.[135]

Here, Sells asserts that Ibn 'Arabi's theory of belief may be helpful for comparative study *because* it goes beyond normative conceptions of religious exclusivity. As I have argued above, Sells makes such an assertion based upon a conflation of Ibn 'Arabi's idea of the "gods of belief" and the secular-liberal notion of "religion" *as a private set of beliefs*. Importantly, such a (Protestant) conflation relegates any notion of revealed law, i.e., the sharia, as inconsequential to Ibn 'Arabi's so-called universalism. Yet, as I have shown above—and will demonstrate more forcefully below—Ibn 'Arabi's entire cosmology and cosmography are based upon the hierarchical superiority of Muhammad as both "spiritual" exemplar *and* "prophetic" lawgiver. Indeed, Ibn 'Arabi succinctly articulates this idea in the same passage in the *Fuṣūṣ* cited above where he compares himself as the Seal of the Saints to Muhammad as the Seal of the Prophets. Here, Ibn 'Arabi notes that his "inherited" perfection

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[134] Ibid., vol. 5, 192-93 (Fut. III, 167).

[135] Sells, "Ibn ʿArabī's Garden," 314 (emphasis mine).

59

of the Seal of the Saints as the "Saint-Heir" (*al-walī al-wārith*) is only one of the perfections of Muhammad, who is "Saint-Messenger-Prophet" (*al-walī al-rasūl al-nabī*).[136] As exemplified in his own ecstatic utterance in the *Tanazzulāt* above, and his subsequent qualification, the outward importance of the law—and as we shall see *its attendant absolutism*—is for Ibn 'Arabi an integral part of his hierarchical metaphysics and religious cosmography.

If read in the context of his own commentary on the *Tarjumān* verses above, Ibn 'Arabi's clear identification of the Muhammadan saint with the revealed law of Muhammad makes Schimmel's reading of metaphysical and religious triumphalism appear much more compelling than Sells's claims for universality. It is thus evident that the Muhammadan saint whose "heart is capable of every form" and whose religion is the "religion of love" is a saint who inherits the particular comprehensive perfection of the prophet Muhammad as God's beloved. Rather than articulating prophetic equivalence or the universal transcendence of outward form, such perfection is a subsumption of all revealed knowledge and thus a forceful assertion of the spiritual sovereignty of Muhammad in both socio-historical and *logoic* terms. Yet, these insights can only be brought into stark relief against the background of Ibn 'Arabi's specific discursive positions regarding the People of the Book. It is thus to such discourse that this chapter now must turn.

Ibn 'Arabi and the "Infidelity" of the People of the Book

In a recent article entitled "Interreligious Dialogue: Ibn 'Arabi and Meister Eckhart," the distinguished Iranian scholar of Ibn 'Arabi Ghasem Kakaie also invokes Ibn 'Arabi's "religion of love" and the *Tarjumān* verses as an example of Ibn 'Arabi's "tolerance" of

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[136] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 64.

different forms of worship.[137] In a section itself entitled "Religious Tolerance," Kakaie

situates the basis of his argument within the medieval context of the Crusades and the call he

believes that mystics like Ibn ʿArabi answered to address the obvious need for healing

between the faiths: "*It was during the time of these Crusades that the greatest Christian and*

Muslim mystics appeared and set in motion dialogue between religions, calling for religion to

return to its essence."[138] Kakaie goes on to state that since Ibn ʿArabi seems to support a

Muslim victory over Christian crusaders, "[w]e would therefore expect Ibn ʿArabi to regard

Christians as unbelievers since they were waging war against Allah, and as polytheists since

they believed in the Trinity and revered the Cross."[139] Yet, Kakaie notes that this is

"surprisingly" not the case, and quotes the following passage from the *Futūḥāt*:

> But it may be hoped that the people of the Trinity, because of the state of being odd, which is
> hidden in the Trinity, will be saved. For odd is among the attributions of the One. They are
> therefore monotheists through the *tawhid* of combination. And it is to be hoped that they will
> be covered by combined mercy... it is likely that the people of Trinity will be included among
> the monotheists because they hold to this oddness in God and not because they hold to the
> oneness of God. I found them in this way through intuition and I was not able to make a
> distinction between monotheists and the people of the Trinity.[140]

This passage is significant for several reasons. First and foremost, it is the only

example that Kakaie offers to support his claim that Ibn ʿArabi did not regard the Christians

as "unbelievers" and "polytheists" (or associationists), even though we have already

encountered both terms used for Christians in Ibn ʿArabi's letter to Kaykāʾus above. It should

be noted, moreover, that this particular passage from the *Futūḥāt* remains on a very abstract

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[137] Ghasem Kakaie, "Interreligious Dialogue: Ibn ʿArabi and Meister Eckhart," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* 45 (2009): 53, 57.

[138] Kakaie, "Interreligious Dialogue," 49 (emphasis mine).

[139] Ibid. 49-50.

[140] Ibid., 50.

level, and Ibn ʿArabi never mentions "Christians" by name here, but refers only to the "People of the Trinity" (*ahl al-tathlīth*) in a discussion where he also mentions the "People of Oneness" (*ahl tawhīd*) and the dualists (*al-thanawīyya*).

In the text that precedes the passage above, Ibn ʿArabi states that the people of oneness are those who inhabit paradise since they have the attribute of oneness, and the dualists inhabit hell since they do not have such an attribute and are thus "the people of associationism" (*ahl shirk*). The People of the Trinity, according to Ibn ʿArabi, are located between the former and the latter. Thus, when Ibn ʿArabi states "it may be hoped" that the People of the Trinity will be "saved," he uses the verbal noun *al-takhalluṣ* denoting purification; the verb itself (*takhallaṣa*) meaning to have been freed "from a thing," such as "a gazelle, or a bird, from a snare" or "like spun thread when it has been entangled."[141] Thus in this passage, Ibn ʿArabi hopes that the People of the Trinity will be *purified* within the fire, and thus eventually taken out, and not "preserved from" the fire, which is the sense commonly meant by the English term "saved" that Kakaie's translation suggests.

Finally, when Kakaie translates "And it is to be hoped that they will be covered by combined mercy…" he omits Ibn ʿArabi's following explanation: "that is why they [i.e., the People of the Trinity] are named 'disbelievers' (*kuffār*) because they have covered (*satarū*) the second by the third. Thus, the second becomes like an isthmus (*al-barzakh*) between the one and the third."[142] Although he does not mention it directly, Ibn ʿArabi here clearly refers to the Qur'anic verse: "*They have disbelieved* (kafara) *who say: 'Indeed, God is the third of three.' And there is no god except the one God. If they do not desist from what they are*

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[141] Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (1877; reprint, New Delhi: J. Jetley, 1985), 786.

[142] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 5, 199 (Fut. III, 172).

saying, then a painful punishment will afflict those who disbelieved (kafarū) *among them*"

(5:73). Thus, Ibn 'Arabi's commentary employs the term *kuffār* in its double sense, as both

its common negative theological usage as "disbelievers" or "infidels" and also its more

fundamental sense of "those who cover."[143] Therefore, God as "the third of three" conceals

the second hypostasis and thus, according to Ibn 'Arabi, makes the People of the Trinity's

theology indistinguishable from monotheism. Such an exegesis is indeed an example of Ibn

'Arabi's hermeneutics of mercy, which he specifically strives to employ when encountering

any Qur'anic notion of divine wrath and punishment.[144] As Mohammad Khalil recently

points out, the entire concept of "chastisement" for Ibn 'Arabi is "therapeutic"—i.e., "it

rectifies" because it is issued from God through the ruling property of divine mercy. In one

of his more famous inversions, Ibn 'Arabi takes the rectification of divine chastisement to its

logical conclusion where the punishment (ʿadhāb) of Hell ultimately facilitates blissful

"sweetness" (ʿudhūba) for its denizens.[145] Indeed, elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt* Ibn 'Arabi uses

the term for "infidels" (i.e., *kāfirūn* and *kuffār* etc.) to describe the highest category of saints

known as the "people of blame" (*malāmiyya*) who hide themselves from the public, since

"they are those who cover their spiritual station" (*wa hum al-sātirūn maqāmahum*) and are

thus like "farmers because they cover seed in the earth" (*yasturūn al-badhr fī al-arḍ*).[146]

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[143] The Arabic root *k-f-r* means to cover or hide, and in the context of infidelity, that of the "Truth."

[144] See Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean without Shore: Ibn ʿArabî, the Book, and the Law*, trans. David Streight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) 51.

[145] Mohammad Hassan Khalil, *Islam and the Fate of Others: The Salvation Question* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 66. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 94.

[146] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 3, 158 (Fut. II, 136).

Here, the association of "blame" and infidelity, as discussed above, can be understood as part of what Ernst has called "the Hallajian topos" of "mystical infidelity."[147]

Yet in the previous passage discussed by Kakaie, it is clear that the People of the Trinity inhabit a theological liminal realm somewhere between those who profess God's oneness and dwell in paradise eternally and those who associate partners with God who are promised eternal damnation.[148] Such a theological liminality is not enough to prevent them from being placed in Hell, but in the end, according to Ibn 'Arabi's revelatory exegesis (*al-kashf al-maʿnawi*), their etymological link to "covering" as "infidels" (*kuffār*) will allow God's similar attribute to "cover" them in mercy and save them from Hell, not because of their theology of oneness, but because of their theology of "singularity" (*fardaniyya*)—what Kakaie translates above as "oddness."[149]

Besides the fact that Kakaie's claim that medieval Muslim and Christian mystics appeared during the Crusades to "*set in motion dialogue between religions*" is very difficult to sustain historically (while the converse has been compellingly argued),[150] Ibn 'Arabi's revisionist hermeneutics of the doctrine of the Trinity further problematizes such claims even

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[147] As Ernst notes, although not part of the Nishapur *Malamati*, Hallaj's "desire for martyrdom, to suffer under the law, takes *malamah* to its extreme. It is not accidental that Hallaj has been called *Sultan al-Malamatiyin*, 'King of the Self-blamers.'" Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 70, 71, 74, passim.

[148] Ibn 'Arabi maintains the Qur'anic position that God forgives all sin except associationism, and those who do so are in Hell eternally. However, his conception of eternal Hell is quite unconventional since, as mentioned above, he believes that Hell will eventually become cool and pleasant for its inhabitants after they have been purified by it. See Khalil, *Islam*, 66-69.

[149] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 5, 199 (Fut. III, 172).

[150] As mentioned above, Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) and Catherine of Siena (d. 1380) strongly supported the Crusades. Regarding the "spiritual" aspect of the Crusades from a Christian perspective see Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1967), 102-107. For a treatment of Sufis as the "Prophet's community-in-arms" in response to the Crusades see S. Abdullah Schleifer "*Jihad* and Traditional Islamic Consciousness," *The Islamic Quarterly* 27/4 (1983): 188-191.

though he declares their ultimate salvation.[151] Moreover, assertions of Ibn ʿArabi's doctrinal

openness to Christianity also need to take into account his more well-known disavowal of the

Christian doctrine of the incarnation (al-ḥūlul) as disbelief in the Fuṣūṣ. Here, Ibn ʿArabi

notes that because people witnessed Jesus give life to the dead, they believed he was God.

Thus, he states: "This led some of them to the doctrine of incarnation and (the assertion) that

he is God."[152] Here again, Ibn ʿArabi expounds upon the etymology of the term kufr, but in a

more negative sense: "For that, they are accused of disbelief (al-kufr), which is a covering

(al-sitr), because they conceal God who (in reality) gives life to the dead in the human form

of Jesus."[153]

While mention of Jews and Christians specifically in the Futūḥāt is relatively rare,[154]

there are several places besides his letter to Kaykāʾus where Ibn ʿArabi refers to them by

name as engaging in open disbelief/infidelity (kufr). While Ibn ʿArabi's "hermeneutics of

mercy" often transmogrifies derogatory terms into their positive etymological usages, as in

the example of the "infidelity" of the people of blame mentioned above and elsewhere,[155] his

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[151] In other words, few Christians would agree with Ibn ʿArabi's disavowal of their doctrine as something different than monotheism.

[152] Ibn al-ʿArabī, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, 141.

[153] Ibid. Here, it should be noted that Ibn ʿArabi's critique is uniquely colored by his particular "monistic" view, and thus demurs at the specific identification of God with Jesus, rather than a more traditional critique of identification of God with any form at all; i.e., simply saying that Jesus was God is not the problem, but the addition that he qua God was the son of Mary specifically. Corbin's description of this difference as one between "theophany" and "hypostasis" is perhaps helpful. Not only is the theophany of God not limited to one particular person (i.e., Christ), but the "place of this Presence is the consciousness of the individual believer, or more exactly, the theophanic Imagination invested in him. […] The Incarnation, on the other hand, is hypostatic union. It occurs 'in the flesh' […]." Corbin, Alone with the Alone, 275, 313.

[154] I.e., naṣārā and yahūd and taken together as the People of the Book (ahl al-kitāb). For naṣārā as the Qur'anic term for Christians in general see J. M. Fiey, "Naṣārā," in The Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed., vol. 7 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 970.

[155] This is perhaps most famously demonstrated in the chapter of Noah in the Fuṣūṣ, See Affifi, 73. See also Chodkiewicz, An Ocean without Shore, 50-52.

use of such terms does not always entail semantic inversion. Like the master of mystical

infidelity himself, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 1131), Ibn ʿArabi employs the idea of

infidelity in different registers including its most common or "outward" (*ẓāhirī*) form.[156] For

example, in a discussion of how disbelieving speech (*kalimāt kufr*) returns to the people who

utter such words and afflicts them on the Day of Resurrection, Ibn ʿArabi in an apparent

allusion to Qur'an 9:30-31 states that "such is the case with the disbelief (*al-kufr*) and

blasphemy (*al-sabb*) spoken by the Jews and Christians with respect to God."[157]

Within a more metaphysical discussion elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn ʿArabi asserts

that God has "unqualified existence" (*muṭlaq al-wujūd*). In a typical example of how Ibn

ʿArabi's discourse stretches the limits of language to inversion, he then states:

> Yet, no qualification can prevent Him qualifying Himself. Rather, all qualifications are His—
> He is unqualified qualification. Thus, no qualification imposes itself upon Him over another,
> i.e., the relation of non-qualification to Him. He whose existence is through this relationship
> has unqualified attribution, not one specific relation over another.[158]

Perhaps out of concern that such a statement could be read as an argument for

incarnationalism (*ḥulūl*), i.e. God qualifying Himself *as a particular form*, the passage here

takes an unexpected turn. Ibn ʿArabi thus refers to the Jews and Christians as perpetrators of

the worst type of disbelief (*kufr*), since they "particularized" divine qualities specifically to

themselves:

> So, severe disbelief (*kufr*) is attained only by particularism (*takhṣīṣ*) in this relationship like
> the Jews and the Christians said about themselves over others from the people of religions

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[156] As Ernst notes, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt recognized four levels of infidelity. While the first, "outward infidelity" (*kufr-i ẓahir*), is what is commonly understood as "infidelity" according to Islamic law and consists of denial of the

truth or an aspect of the sharia, the other stages have to do with "the path of progressive self-annihilation." These include: infidelity of the lower self (*kufr-i nafs*), Muhammadan infidelity (*kufr-i muḥammadī*), and real infidelity (*kufr-i ḥaqīqī*). See Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 80, 81.

[157] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 235 (Fut. I, 191).

[158] Ibid., vol. 5, 187 (Fut. III, 162).

and sects (*al-milal wa al-niḥal*): "*We are the sons of God and His beloved ones.*"[159] Thus, they associated (themselves) with Him in what was (in reality) a universalized relationship, which was a mistake in the truth-in-itself (*nafs al-amr*). So God said to them: "*So why then does He punish you for your sins? On the contrary, you are mortals from among those whom He created.*"[160] God, the most high, says the relationship is one, so why particularize yourselves in it over others?[161]

The Qur'anic verse that Ibn 'Arabi invokes here is indeed preceded by another famous Qur'anic verse that specifically calls the deification of Jesus disbelief (*kufr*), which Ibn 'Arabi also quotes in his above censure of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation in the *Fuṣūṣ*: "*Those who say that God is the Messiah, son of Mary have disbelieved.*"[162]

As evinced by Ibn 'Arabi's comments surveyed above, the category of disbelief/infidelity (*kufr*) and who is to be considered a disbeliever or infidel (*kāfir*) can be found embedded within his highly abstract metaphysical discourse. In the Qur'anic context, the *kāfirūn* are those who refute the mission of Muhammad (e.g., 50:2) or that of previous messengers (e.g., 41:14), and in the systematic texts of jurisprudence the People of the Book are deemed to be among them, although occupying a special position in terms of their "protected" (*dhimmī*) status as witnessed in the Pact of 'Umar above and discussed at length below.[163] Thus, Ibn 'Arabi's above categorization of the People of the Book as *kuffār* should be contextualized not only within a longstanding tradition of Muslim polemics,[164] but

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[159] Qur'an 5:18.

[160] Ibid.

[161] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 5, 187 (Fut. III, 162). Like Ibn 'Arabi's critique of the doctrine of incarnation in the *Fuṣūṣ* mentioned above, the mistake is a particularization of God's attributes with one specific group or form rather than an acknowledgement of the truth, as Ibn 'Arabi sees it, that humanity shares in God's attributes universally through the Logos *qua* Perfect Man. See p. 65n153 above.

[162] Qur'an 5:17. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 141.

[163] W. Björkman, "Kāfir," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 408.

[164] An important part of classical Muslim anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemics focused on the Jewish anthropomorphism and conception of God and Christian incarnationalism (*ḥulūl*), as well as their exclusive

perhaps more foundationally within the context of the Qur'an itself and the medieval tradition of Islamic legal hermeneutics.

Ibn 'Arabi and the Idea of Sufism in a Ghazalian Age

By the time Ibn 'Arabi openly emerged as the Seal of the Saints at the turn of thirteenth century,[165] the broad arc of the Islamic intellectual tradition was centered on legal discourse rather than upon more philosophical modes of thought. According to Jackson, the flexibility of legal praxis was particularly well suited to allow the Muslim intellectual community to "accommodate change and diversity across space and time […]."[166] Because philosophical discourses deal in competing universal truth claims, as mentioned in the introduction to this study, it is much harder for them to simultaneously accommodate contradiction.[167]

Thus, sharia oriented praxis gave the medieval Islamic intellectual tradition the grounding it needed to allow more abstract modes of thought, such as philosophy and speculative mysticism, to maintain a connection to the larger communal tradition while remaining to a relative degree semantically fluid and creative. As Hodgson notes, "*provided certain rules were observed*, Muslims were free to learn almost anything with only a minimal risk of penalization; much less risk, on the whole, than was run by their opposite numbers in the Occident."[168] Here, "[t]he esoteric did not claim to be in competition with the normal,

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claims to salvation. See Vajda, "Ahl al-Kitāb," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 265-66.

[165] I.e., 1198 CE. See Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 160.

[166] Jackson, "Islam(s) East and West," 129.

[167] Ibid., 129-130.

[168] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2, 194 (emphasis mine).

generally accepted exoteric truth; rather, it was to complement it."[169] Thus, by the end of the

eleventh century and the revalorization of mysticism initiated by Ghazali, Sufism "appeared

as guarantor and interpreter of even the Shar'î aspects of the Islamic faith."[170] Indeed, as

Peter Awn notes,

> Rather than relegate the efficacy of religious law solely to the exoteric realm of the
> nonmystic, al-Ghazālī insists that legal observance keeps the Sufi immersed in the broader
> community that mediates spiritual power. To abandon the legal tradition is to abandon any
> link to the Islamic community (*Ummah*) and thus to be incapable of true spiritual growth.
> Sharīʿah, contrary to being a barrier or, worse, superfluous, is essential to progress along the
> Sufi path.[171]

As such, the importance of Ghazali as a forerunner to Ibn 'Arabi cannot be overstated, since

the fusion of jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, and Sufism that he popularized would

become the foundation upon which Ibn 'Arabi would build a century later—indeed, as

quoted above, Ibn 'Arabi understood his given cosmic function as none other than the

protector of "the sanctity of the divine law (*al-sharīʿa*)." Thus, as Hodgson asserts, Ghazali's

"intellectual synthesis […] as he expressed became, in effect, the starting point of the

intellectual flowering of the Earlier Middle period."[172]

Even though Ghazali's position regarding who can rightly be called a disbeliever or

infidel (*kāfir*) is commonly acknowledged as being the most systematically magnanimous

within classical Islam,[173] he nevertheless categorized the People of the Book overall as

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[169] Ibid., 195.

[170] Ibid., 188.

[171] Peter Awn, "Classical Sufi Approaches to Scripture," in *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture*, ed. Steven T. Katz
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 150.

[172] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2, 192.

[173] E.g. the Hungarian Islamicist Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921) described Ghazali's *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna al-islām
wa al-zandaqa* as "a special work on the idea of tolerance." Goldziher quoted in Sherman A. Jackson, *On the
Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghāzalī's Fayṣal al-Tafriqa Bayna al-Islām wa*

kuffār. In this juridical context, as Jackson notes, Ghazali's understanding of belief—i.e.,

"faith" (*īmān*)—as the opposite of disbelief (*kufr*) is framed within a heteronomous tradition

that *necessitates* the acceptance of prophetic transmission *in toto* along with an acceptance of

God:

> On this understanding, one cannot reject the messengers without rejecting the message itself;
> for the messengership of the messengers is part and parcel of the message. Now, one can
> believe in God or the Creator in general without accepting the messengers. But such belief
> would provide no basis for belief in such notions as Paradise and Hell (not to mention
> specific duties such as prayer or fasting). Yet, from the perspective of revealed religion, this
> is the whole point of the matter, and al-Ghazālī is quick to note that *kufr* is a *legal* designation
> that is *posited by scripture*, its chief implication being eternal damnation in Hell. In other
> words, al-Ghazālī's definition of *kufr* is both precise and restrictive. Accordingly, a person
> can believe in God in the ordinary sense but be an Unbeliever in legal/scriptural terms […].[174]

Thus, in Ghazali's early work on theology *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād* (The Middle Course in

Belief), he exposits on which groups will be damned as disbelievers because of their

rejection of the prophethood of Muhammad. As such, Ghazali classifies six levels of denial,

the first being

> the denial (*takdhīb*) of the Jews, Christians, and the people of all of the religious communities
> such as the Zoroastrians, the worshippers of idols, and others. Their disbelief is stipulated in
> the Book [i.e., the Qur'an] and agreed upon (*mujmaʿ*) by the Muslim community (*al-umma*).[175]

Ghazali would later qualify his legal definition of disbelief as it pertains to the People of the

Book in his late work *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna al-islām wa al-zandaqa* (The Decisive

Criterion for Distinguishing Islam from Masked Infidelity) by noting that such a charge

could only be leveled on the condition that the conveyance (*tablīgh*) of the true nature and

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al-Zandaqa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 40. Jackson also praises the *Fayṣal* for its overarching "ecumenical mission" (ibid., 39).

[174] Jackson, introduction to *On the Boundaries*, 58 (emphasis original).

[175] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād,* ed. Ibrahim Agah Çubukçu and Hüseyin Atay (Ankara: Nur Matbaasi, 1962), 248.

message of Muhammad had transpired and was subsequently rejected.[176] Nevertheless, such

qualifications did not alter his compliance with the classical position that Jews and Christians

were *in principle* disbelievers as cited in *al-Iqtiṣād* above (i.e., since they rejected—either

entirely or only in part—the prophethood of Muhammad and the prophetic injunctions

associated with the revelation of the Qur'an). Indeed, in the *Fayṣal*, Ghazali states:

> Disbelief (*kufr*) is the denial of the Messenger (blessings and peace be upon him) in anything from what he has brought. And faith (*īmān*) is the validation of all that he brought. So the Jew and the Christian are both disbelievers because they deny the Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace.[177]

Ghazali goes on to note that the Jews and Christians—as well as other groups such as the

prophecy denying rationalists (*al-barāhima*),[178] the dualists (*al-thanawīyya*), and the

heretical philosophers (*al-zanādiqa*)—"are all associationists (*mushrikūn*) in that they all

deny the Messenger; indeed, every disbeliever (*kāfir*) denies the Messenger, may God bless

him and grant him peace."[179] It is thus the denial of Muhammad, according to Ghazali, that is

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[176] Ghazali stipulated three possible categories: (1) those who never heard the name of Muhammad, (2) those who heard his name, but received incorrect, insufficient, or misleading information, and (3) those who heard his name and understood his life and mission correctly and in full detail. As such, it was only the latter who could be considered to be disbelievers if they rejected Muhammad's religion. See Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 65, 126; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna al-islām wa al-zandaqa* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr al-Lubnani, 1993), 84.

[177] Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-tafriqa*, 25.

[178] On the origins of this term and its association with the *topos* of rationalism in medieval Islamic literature see Bruce B. Lawrence, *Shahrastānī on the Indian Religions* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 76, 84.

[179] Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-tafriqa*, 26. Jackson finds Ghazali's categorization of Jews and Christians as "associationists" to be "somewhat out of place." In a bid to explain this, he rather unconvincingly speculates that what Ghazali may "have in mind is the idea that all of these groups seek in some sense to extract service from nature via supernatural, as opposed to scientific, means." Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 135-36n14. Yet, Ghazali's assertion seems more likely to be derived directly from the Qur'an. Besides Qur'an 9:31 which accuses the Jews and Christians of taking their rabbis and monks as lords besides God, the Qur'an also acknowledges "caprice" (*hawan*) as an internal force that people worship instead of God (e.g., 25:43, 28:50, 45:23).

tantamount to the denial of God.[180]

It is from within such a Ghazalian juridical milieu that Ibn 'Arabi's above claims that the Jews and Christians were guilty of disbelief or infidelity are best situated. Indeed, Ibn 'Arabi's clear identification with Muhammad in his *logoic* comprehensiveness as both the spiritual heir of the "purest Muhammadan station" (*al-maqām al-muḥammadī al-aṭhar*) and divine guardian of the sharia appear to indicate that, like Ghazali, he identified an important aspect of his metaphysics *as inherently linked to* the hierarchical schema of medieval Islamic jurisprudence and its attendant "Muhammadan" supersessionism. Such supersessionism, as Hodgson notes, was normative to the classical "Sharʿî Islamic vision," which saw the Muslim community "as one among many divinely guided communities such as the Jewish or the Christian, all (*at their origin*) equally blessed."[181] As such,

> Islam took explicitly the form that various Christian and Jewish bodies had implicitly been assuming under the confessional empires—an autonomous social organism with its own law for its own members. *The difference between Islam and the other communities was that Islam was first to rule over and then to supersede all others*. Islam was to bring the true and uncorrupted divine guidance to all mankind, creating a world-wide society in which the true revelation would be the everyday norm of all the nations.[182]

Yet, because of Ibn 'Arabi's repeated emphasis on the Qur'anic notion that Muslims are to believe that all pre-Islamic revelations are sent as true divine messages from one God, it is often assumed that Ibn 'Arabi believes all revelations to be contemporaneously "valid" and thus *not superseded* by Islam. Since Ibn 'Arabi mentions Jews and Christians by name so infrequently, one can argue, as Chittick does in *Imaginal Worlds* (quoted in the introduction

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[180] As noted above, Ibn 'Arabi took the same view based upon Qur'an 4:80 and as such went so far as to categorize Muhammad as an "attribute" of God; see pp. 52 above. The Qur'an itself repeatedly associates obedience to the Messenger (*al-rasūl*) as obedience to God (e.g., 4:13-14; 4:59; 4:80; 24:52; 24:63; 47:33).

[181] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1, 317.

[182] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

to this chapter), that Ibn 'Arabi only refers to them in terms of the historical context of the Qur'anic revelation. Such Qur'anic criticism, so the argument goes, was never meant to be more than the censure of specific groups during the life of Muhammad, since other Jews and Christians are indeed praised within the Qur'an.[183] Thus in *Imaginal Worlds*, Chittick summarizes this position as follows:

> In short, the Koran declares that the essential message of every prophet is the same, while the details of each message is unique. *Hence the universality of religious truth is an article of Islamic faith*. It is true that many Muslims believe that the universality of guidance pertains only to pre-Koranic times, but others disagree [...].[184]

Although Chittick does not state which Qur'anic verses he is referring to here, Qur'an 3:84—which as mentioned above was (re)revealed to Ibn 'Arabi himself when he attained to the Muhammadan Station at the end of his spiritual ascension—is exemplary.[185] As we recall, this verse exhorts Muhammad and those who follow him to assert faith in God and the Qur'an, while simultaneously asserting faith "*in what was sent down upon Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob, and the tribes (of Israel), and in what was given to Moses, Jesus, and the Prophets from their Lord.*" Qur'an 3:84 thus categorically proclaims: "*we do not distinguish between any of them.*"

In light of such Qur'anic assertions, in one of his major technical works on Ibn 'Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, Chittick states that Ibn 'Arabi "*frequently affirms the validity of religions other than Islam*, and in so doing he is *simply stating the clear Koranic*

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[183] A similar argument for the particularism of the Qur'anic critique of the People of the Book has been recently made by Fred Donner in *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), see esp. 68-71. See also Vajda, "Ahlal-Kitāb," 264.

[184] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 124 (emphasis mine).

[185] There are other similar Qur'anic verses, such as 2:136 and 2:285.

position."[186] The following example from the *Futūḥāt* is a good illustration of Chittick's

assertion. Here, Ibn ʿArabi states:

> As for a revealed law (*sharʿ*) previous to us, it is not required of us to follow it except for what our law has confirmed from it, even though it is a true revelation for those it was addressed to. We do not say that it is false (*bāṭil*); *rather, we believe in God, and his messenger and what was revealed to him and that which was revealed before him from the Book and the law*.[187]

In *Imaginal Worlds*, Chittick thus summarizes his position regarding Ibn ʿArabi's

universalism in relation to the juridical idea of "abrogation" (*naskh*):

> The Koran never criticizes the prophetic messages as such, but it often condemns misunderstandings or distortions by those who follow the prophets. The Shaykh sometimes criticizes specific distortions or misunderstandings in the Koranic vein, but he does not draw the conclusion that many Muslims have drawn—that the coming of Islam abrogated (*naskh*) previous revealed religions. Rather, he says, Islam is like the sun and other religions like the stars. Just as the stars remain when the sun rises, so also the other religions remain valid when Islam appears.[188]

It is thus Chittick's claim that while Ibn ʿArabi may criticize other religions, he does

so only to correct particular "misunderstandings or distortions." Yet, he does not, according

to Chittick, believe—*like the majority of his coreligionists*—that Islam "abrogated" the other

religions. While the category of abrogation (*naskh*) commonly denotes an *intra*-textual

supersession of certain canonical textual prescriptions or prohibitions by other such texts

within the Islamic discursive tradition itself, its usage here denotes an inter-scriptural process

where the laws of an entire religious dispensation (e.g., Islam) supersede and cancel a

previous one (e.g., Christianity). As noted in the introduction to this study, just as medieval

Christians understood Christianity as superseding Judaism, medieval Muslim scholars

unquestionably understood Islam as superseding the dispensations of the People of the

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[186] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 171.

[187] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 3, 192 (Fut. II, 165).

[188] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 125 (underline mine).

Book.[189] Indeed Ghazali, like al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153) whose position on abrogation was quoted in the introduction, also unquestionably took this position as a manifestation of the divine will.[190] Yet, Chittick *categorically* claims above that rather than holding such a normative concept of abrogation, Ibn ʻArabi believes all prophetic religions are contemporaneously valid. It is thus to a deeper analysis of such a formidable assertion that we are finally prepared to turn.

Ibn ʻArabi and the Aporia of "Abrogation" (*naskh*)

In support of his claim that Ibn ʻArabi did not hold that the previous revealed religions have been abrogated by the revelation of the Qur'an, and as such remain valid, in *Imaginal Worlds* Chittick translates the following passage from the *Futūḥāt* (i.e., Fut. III, 153) as a proof-text:

> All the revealed religions [*sharāʼiʻ*] are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden, and their lights are included in the light of the sun. Their being hidden <u>is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions that takes place through Muhammad's revealed religion</u>. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the light of the stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all messengers and all the revealed religions. <u>They are not rendered null [*bāṭil*] by abrogation</u>—that is the opinion of the ignorant.[191]

Although the passage appears to relay the overall sense of Chittick's argument—i.e., that the religions are still somehow valid after Muhammad's religion—it also seemingly contradicts itself. The passage initially states that there *is indeed* something called "abrogation": "Their being hidden *is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions that takes place through*

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[189] See John Burton, "Abrogation," in *Encyclopedia of the Qurʼān*, vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 11-12. See also Waardenburg, "The Medieval Period," See also Jacques Waardenburg, "The Medieval Period 650–1500," in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52; and Vajda, "Ahl al-Kitāb," 265.

[190] al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustaṣfā min ʻilm al-uṣūl,* cited in John Burton, "Abrogation," 11.

[191] Ibn ʻArabi quoted in Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 125 [Fut. III, 153] (underline mine).

Muhammad's revealed religion." Yet, Chittick's proof-text goes on to claim that such

abrogation does not actually cancel the laws of the previous religions: "They are not rendered

null [*bāṭil*] by abrogation." However, the apparent contradiction regarding the reality of

abrogation that according to Ibn 'Arabi "*takes place through Muhammad's revealed*

religion" is not addressed by Chittick here. Rather, Chittick's above assertion that Ibn 'Arabi

"*does not draw the conclusion that many Muslims have drawn—that the coming of Islam*

abrogated (naskh) *previous revealed religions*" proclaims a definitive resolution. Yet, this

statement is not an argument; it is merely an assertion that does nothing to help us understand

why Ibn 'Arabi apparently contradicts himself. Indeed, there seems to be more to this story

than can be gleaned from this passage alone.

In 1996, Nuh Keller also had this sense. A popular American expatriate Sufi shaykh

and translator known for his public defense of Ibn 'Arabi's "orthodoxy"[192] (and criticized for

his religious conservatism),[193] Keller took Chittick to task for leaving out a critical part of the

above passage—a passage that when read in tandem with Chittick's above translation seems

to imply a very different meaning. Keller's translation of Ibn 'Arabi's subsequent passage,

which begins a few lines before Chittick's ends, reads as follows:

> This is why we are required by our universal law to believe in all prophetic messengers
> (*rusul*) and to believe that all their laws are truth, and did not turn into falsehood by being
> abrogated: that is the imagination of the ignorant. So all paths return to look to the Prophet's
> path (Allah bless him and give him peace): if the prophetic messengers had been alive in his

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[192] Keller is the head of the Hāshimī-Darqāwī *tarīqa* (in the Shādhilī ʿAlāwiyya line), and his shaykh, ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Shaghouri (d. 2004), was a public defender of Ibn 'Arabi in Syria. See Nuh Ha Mim Keller, *Sea Without Shore: A Manual of the Sufi Path* (Amman: Sunna Books, 2011), 7. For a brief biography of Keller and history of his order see Marcia Hermansen, "The 'Other' Shadhilis of the West" in *Une voie soufie dans le monde: la Shâdhiliyya*, ed. Eric Geoffroy (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2005), 493-94.

[193] Khaled Abou El Fadl goes as far as to claim that Keller follows Wahhābī "methodology" in his legal discussions. See Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 174. Yet, Keller for his part claims to be against Wahhābī methodology; e.g., see Nuh Ha Mim Keller, "Making the World Safe for Terrorism" (2001): www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/nuh/terrorism.htm.

time, they would have followed him just as their religious laws have followed his law. For he was given Comprehensiveness of Word (*Jawami' al-Kalim*), and given [the Qur'anic verse] 'Allah shall give you an invincible victory' (Qur'an 48:3), 'the invincible' [al-'aziz, also meaning rare, dear, precious, unattainable] being he who is sought but cannot be reached. When the prophetic messengers sought to reach him, he proved impossible for them to attain to—because of his [being favored above them by] being sent to the entire world (*bi'thatihi al 'amma*), and Allah giving him Comprehensiveness of Word (*Jawami' al-Kalim*), and the supreme rank of possessing the Praiseworthy Station (*al-Maqam al-Mahmud*) in the next world, and Allah having made his Nation (*umma*) 'the best Nation ever brought forth for people' (Qur'an 3:110). The Nation of every messenger is commensurate with the station of their prophet, so realize this."[194]

Indeed, this passage that Chittick saw fit to leave untranslated reiterates the comprehensive *logoic* nature of Muhammad's prophethood, as discussed above, and its incorporation of all prophetic paths and realities. As such, the one line that most plainly controverts Chittick's above argument is Ibn 'Arabi's assertion here that: "all paths return to look to the Prophet's path […]: *if the prophetic messengers had been alive in his time, they would have followed him just as their religious laws have followed his law*." Clearly, this is a contradiction since Chittick argues above that Ibn 'Arabi's universalism is transhistorical, i.e., all religions are contemporaneously "valid," whereas the section that Keller translates (and Chittick neglects) implies that Muhammad's law has indeed superseded what came before it.

Yet, as if anticipating Keller's refutation, Chittick offers the following qualification directly after his above translation of Fut. III, 153:

> If the Shaykh's pronouncements on other religions sometimes fail to recognize their validity in his own time, one reason may be that, like most other Muslims living in the western Islamic lands, he had little real contact with the Christians or Jews in his environment, not to speak of followers of religions farther afield. He had probably never met a saintly representative of either of these traditions, and he almost certainly had never read anything about these two religions except what was written in Islamic sources. Hence there is no reason that he should have accepted the validity of these religions except *in principle*. But this is an important qualification. To maintain the particular excellence of the Koran and the superiority of Muhammad over all other prophets is not to deny the universal validity of revelation nor the necessity of revelation's appearing in particularized expressions. Since all

[194] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 5, 177 (Fut. III, 153) translated by Nuh Ha Mim Keller in "On the validity of all religions in the thought of ibn Al-'Arabi and Emir 'Abd al-Qadir: a letter to 'Abd al-Matin" (1996): www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/nuh/amat.htm. See published version in Keller, *Sea Without Shore*, 322-25.

revealed religions are true in principle, the particular circumstances that lead one to suspect that they have been corrupted may change.[195]

While chapter 2 will analyze in detail the underlying assertions in Chittick's above passage that allude to the historical debate around so-called "corruption" (*taḥrīf*) of revelations prior to the Qur'an,[196] here it is sufficient to note that Chittick seems to backpedal somewhat from his original position. While Chittick initially claimed above that Ibn ʿArabi asserted that "*the other religions remain valid when Islam appears*," he here qualifies this statement and suggests that *even if* Ibn ʿArabi does "*sometimes fail to recognize their validity in his own time*" this is so because he "had probably never met a saintly representative of either of these traditions." If Ibn ʿArabi had, Chittick avers, he would have unequivocally accepted the forms of Judaism and Christianity that were practiced in his own time. In other words, Chittick claims here that while Ibn ʿArabi may have thought that particular forms of Judaism and Christianity practiced in his own day were corrupt, he nevertheless maintained that they were "true in principle" and therefore essentially "valid." Thus, Chittick asserts that even if Ibn ʿArabi sometimes seems to admit to abrogation, he nevertheless rejects the normative position that Islam abrogates previous revelation in absolute terms. Thus, as Chittick states above: "*Since all revealed religions are true in principle, the particular circumstances that lead one to suspect that they have been corrupted may change.*"

Yet, there remains an aporia that neither Chittick's argument nor Keller's refutation seems to resolve. If Ibn ʿArabi's position is indeed a recapitulation of the classical Islamic juridical position of abrogation of all previously revealed religion and their laws (as evinced by Keller's translated passage above asserting that the previous prophets would have

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[195] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 125-26 (underline mine).

[196] See chapter 2, pp. 131-151.

followed Muhammad "*just as their religious laws have followed his law*"), then why does Ibn ʿArabi state in the first part of the passage (as Keller himself translates): "*we are required by our universal law to believe in all prophetic messengers* (rusul) *and to believe that all their laws are truth, and did not turn into falsehood by being abrogated*"? Indeed, if their laws *are* "truth" and *have not been turned* "into falsehood," would not Chittick's universalist argument that they remain valid as contemporaneous religions be reasonable? The answer *must* be yes. So how then is such an aporia to be reconciled?

The way through this paradox is found in an extended discussion within the *Futūḥāt* where Ibn ʿArabi surveys the specific commands revealed by God from within each of the seven heavens.[197] According to Ibn ʿArabi, it is from the fourth heaven that the commands of abrogation of the other religions issue:

> And from the commanded revelation in the fourth heaven is the abrogation (*naskh*) of Muhammad's revealed law (*sharīʿa*) over all of the (previous) revealed laws (*jamīʿ al-sharāʾiʿ*) and the triumph (*ẓuhūr*)[198] of his religion (*dīn*) over all of the religions (*adyān*) of each messenger who preceded him and each revealed book.[199]

Indeed, this is the only place in the *Futūḥāt* that Ibn ʿArabi uses the term "religion" (*dīn*) in the plural (i.e., *adyān*),[200] and it is telling that he does so in order to express the superiority of Muhammad's revealed law over them. He continues:

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[197] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 181-83 (Fut. I, 144-146).

[198] According to Lane, the infinitive *ẓuhūr* with the prep. *ʿalā / bi* is rendered in its first form perfect *ẓahara ʿalayhi*: "*He overcame, conquered, subdued, overpowered, or mastered, him; gained the mastery or victory, or prevailed, over him*." See Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (1877; reprint, New Delhi: J. Jetley, 1985), 1926. This is the same sense of the fourth form verb *liyuẓhirahu* in Qurʾan 9:33, which Ibn ʿArabi seems to refer to here: "*It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth to triumph over every religion, though the associationists are averse*."

[199] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 182 (Fut. I, 145).

[200] In all other cases, Ibn ʿArabi importantly prefers to refer to previous "religions" as "revealed laws" (*sharāʾiʿ*), thus emphasizing in Ibn ʿArabi's normative conception how the "true" religion of God is continuous, while the rulings are what change according to the particular prophetic messenger and the times and conditions of the age they manifest within.

> The only ruling (*ḥukm*) of God that remains from the religion of the (previous) religions is what Muhammad has firmly determined for it by his confirmation (*taqrīr*);[201] so, it is (now) of Muhammad's law and his universal messengership (*ʿumūm risāla*). If there remains a ruling other than this, then it is not from the ruling of God except for among the People of the Poll-Tax (*jizya*) in particular.[202] However, as we said, it is not (in reality) a ruling of God, because He named it "invalid" (*bāṭil*).[203]

Here, it is necessary to pause and note that Ibn ʿArabi himself appears to contradict the passage above discussed by Chittick and Keller where he asserts that it is only the opinion of "the ignorant" that the religions previous to Islam are "invalid" (*bāṭil*). While the meaning of this apparent contradiction will be made clear below, for now let us focus on what proves to be the critical element of this passage, namely, Ibn ʿArabi's mention of "the People of the Poll-Tax (*jizya*)"—i.e., the People of the Book—as somehow encompassing an "exception" to the legal classification of "invalidity" assigned to previous religious laws after the coming of Islam. Thus, directly after Ibn ʿArabi states that in fact God has named the remaining ruling "invalid," he asserts:

> So, the (previous ruling) is *against* the one who has followed it, not *for* him (*fa huwa ʿalā man ittabaʿahu lā lahu*).[204] This is what I mean by the triumph of Muhammad's religion over all of the religions, like al-Nābigha[205] in his panegyric said:

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[201] Although the pronoun here can grammatically refer to God, it is perhaps better read as referring to Muhammad since in legal discourse the verb *taqrīr* refers to Muhammad's approval of an action as the determination of permissibility in legal rulings. See "Sources of Law," in *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Law*, ed. Arif Ali Khan and Tauqir Mohammad Khan, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2006), 76.

[202] I.e., they can use their own rulings.

[203] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 182 (Fut. I, 145).

[204] While this line connotes the idea of the People of the Book's rulings bearing "witness" against them on the Day of Judgment, given Ibn ʿArabi's assertion that the People of the Book will gain "felicity" by following such laws, the prepositional binary "against/for" (*ʿalā/li*) is perhaps best understood as "in spite of." In other words, although the People of the Book are an exception to the general rule of abrogation, their relative "success" as adopted members within the Muslim *umma* is afforded to them *in spite of* their own laws, not *because of them*. For more on Ibn ʿArabi's acknowledgement of the People of the Book's "success" or "felicity" (*saʿāda*) see chapter 2, pp. 151-53.

[205] al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī, one of the six preeminent pre-Islamic Arabic poets famous for his *Dīwān*. See Wilhelm Ahlwardt, *The Divans of the Six Ancient Arabic Poets Ennabiga, ʿAntara, Tharafa, Zuhair, ʿAlqama and Imruulqais: Chiefly According to the Mss. of Paris, Gotha, and Leyden; and the Collection of their Fragments with a List of the Various Readings of the Text* (London: Trübner and Company, 1870); and A.

> Do you not see that God has given you such a superior rank (*sura*),
>> that you see every king below you groveling (*yatadhabdhabu*)?
> For you are a sun, and the kings stars;
>> when the sun rises, there is no longer a single star apparent.[206]

This is the rank of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, and the rank of the revealed law that he brought among the prophets and their revealed laws, God's peace be upon all of them.

Indeed, the light of the stars is subsumed (*indaraja*) within the light of the sun. So, the day is ours, but the People of the Book only have the night, that is, if "*they offer the poll tax* (jizya) *in a willing state of subjugation*"[207] .[208]

In light of this passage, Chittick's use of Fut. III, 153 in *Imaginal Worlds* as a proof-text for Ibn 'Arabi's position on abrogation emerges as incomplete and thus overwhelmingly misleading. Here, it becomes clear that the sun and stars metaphor in Fut. III, 153 is only an allusion to the poem by al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī (one of the six famous pre-Islamic Arabic poets) directly referenced in the passage above (Fut. I, 145). This "ur-passage" thus clarifies Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of abrogation, which here asserts that all religious dispensations have been rendered "invalid" from "On High"—i.e., from the fourth heaven—by the manifestation of Muhammad's revelation. Indeed, as noted above, Ghazali also held that the abrogation of the previous religions by Muhammad's revelation was an expression of the divine will.[209]

Yet, for Ibn 'Arabi things are not so simple. He *also* asserts in his ur-passage above, that the legal classification of "protection" (*dhimma*)—as made operative through the

Arazi, "al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd ed., vol. 7 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 840-42.

[206] From al-Nābigha's *Dīwān* and composed for Nuʿmān b. Mundhīr, the king of Ḥīra. See Al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī, *Le Dîwân de Nâbiga Dhobyânî*, ed. and trans. Hartwig Derenbourg (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1869), 83 (Arabic), 126 (French translation).

[207] Qur'an 9:29.

[208] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 182 (Fut. I, 145).

[209] See p. 74n190 above.

payment of the poll-tax (*jizya*) and its attendant humiliation and subjugation—does allow for the continuation of Jewish and Christian law, albeit in an impeded fashion. Thus, Ibn ‘Arabi can emphatically state (in Chittick's rendering above) that the revealed religions, i.e., Judaism and Christianity, "are not rendered null [*bāṭil*] by abrogation." Yet, the question remains just what kind of validity do such religions really have, if they can, according to Ibn ‘Arabi, only function as subsumed—i.e., subjugated—within the sun of Muhammad's dispensation? Indeed, as Ibn ‘Arabi asserts, "the day is ours, but the People of the Book only have the night." Moreover, the allotment of even only "night" is, as Ibn ‘Arabi makes clear by quoting the final words of Qur'an 9:29, one that is *only made viable* through the humiliation of the poll-tax:

> *Fight those who were given the Book—those who do not believe in God or in the last day, do not hold to be prohibited what God and His Messenger have declared to be so, and do not follow the religion of truth—until they offer the poll-tax in a willing state of subjugation.*

Ibn ‘Arabi's reference to this Qur'anic call for the subjugation of the People of the Book by force of arms—in combination with his initial exaltation of "the triumph (*ẓuhūr*)" of Muhammad's religion and al-Nābigha's verse extoling the triumphant king over his groveling vanquished—renders contemporary constructions of Ibn ‘Arabi as a "universalist," such as Chittick's, deeply problematic.

Rather than simply an anomaly in Ibn ‘Arabi's discourse, the idea that the People of the Book are allowed as the "the protected people" (*ahl al-dhimma*) to continue to follow their laws *because* of their willing subjugation, and thus subsumption, within the Muhammadan sharia emerges as a coherent element within Ibn ‘Arabi's metaphysical discourse. This particular idea—what I refer to as the "qualified subjugation" of the People of the Book—is mentioned in several places in the *Futūḥāt.* In one particularly telling passage, Ibn ‘Arabi discusses the case of miraculously long-lived saints who were deputies

(*auṣiyāʾ* /s. *waṣī*) of past prophets, but were still alive during the time of Muhammad and were brought his revealed knowledge by the enigmatic figure of "Khiḍr, the companion of Moses."[210] As such, Ibn ʿArabi relays the story of Ibn Barthalmā who reportedly testified to the prophecy of Muhammad in front of an envoy of the caliph ʿUmar, even though he was a saintly deputy of Jesus. Ibn ʿArabi, referring to Barthalmā as a "monk," thus states:

> Do you think that monk remained on the rulings of the Christians? No, by God, the sacred law (*sharīʿa*) of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, is abrogative (*nāsikha*)! For he states, may God bless him and grant him peace, "If Moses were alive he would not be capable of following anyone but me." And similarly, when Jesus descends he will only lead us from us, that is, by our way (*sunna*) and he will only judge us by our law (*sharīʿa*).[211]

Yet, Ibn ʿArabi goes on to qualify this statement:

> This monk was of the Christ-like saints (*ʿīsawiyyīn*) who inherit from Jesus, upon him be peace, until the time of Muhammad's mission. So when Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, was sent, this monk worshiped God through Muhammad's law (*sharīʿa*). But his knowledge (of Muhammad's revelation) is from God's presence (*ladunhu*) that was brought by His mercy, and he inherits the Christ-like condition again through Muhammad. So he remains a Christ-like saint (*ʿīsawī*) on two sacred laws (*al-sharīʿatain*). Do you not see that this monk had been informed about the descent of Jesus, may God bless him, and when he will kill the pig and break the cross?[212] Do you think that he remains (on the opinion) that the meat of the pig is permissible (*taḥlīl*)? So this monk remains Christ-like on two laws, and has twice the reward—a reward for following his prophet and a reward for following Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace; he is waiting for Jesus to descend.[213]

In these passages, Ibn ʿArabi discusses a special situation of a saint who originally was Christian, but because of the appearance of Muhammad was obliged to adopt his law; thus, Ibn ʿArabi here, as he repeats elsewhere, relates a hadith that asserts if Moses were alive he

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[210] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 274 (Fut. I, 225).

[211] Ibid., 273 (Fut. I, 224).

[212] There are several hadiths that assert Jesus will, upon his return, "break the cross and kill the pig." See e.g., Bukhārī, *al-Buyū*ʿ, 177.

[213] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 274 (Fut. I, 225).

would follow Muhammad.[214] Similarly, he states that when Jesus descends he will judge by the sharia of Muhammad. Yet, even though this saint becomes Muslim as it were—even, according to Ibn 'Arabi, following Qur'anic dietary prohibitions—he remains a Christian but renews his status as an "heir" (*wārith*) of Jesus through the intermediary of Muhammad.

Ibn 'Arabi goes on to note that during the time when Ibn Barthalmā was seen by the Companions

> they did not ask him about his state in Islam and faith, nor did they ask from which of the sacred laws does he worship, because the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, did not command them to ask such questions. We know for certain that the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, does not acknowledge anyone upon associationism (*shirk*) and that he knew that God—out of His mercy and grace—took responsibility to teach (some) servants from His presence (*ladunhu*) knowledge that He revealed upon him, may God bless and grant him peace.[215]

Here we can sense Ibn 'Arabi's apprehension regarding an imagined interlocutor questioning the theology of this Christian monk—was he an associationist (*mushrik*)? Ibn 'Arabi's attention to this concern shows that he took this question seriously, i.e., Christians were normally understood as such. Ibn 'Arabi assures his readers that this could not have been the case since such a saint spiritually inherits directly from Muhammad and thus, apparently, must have the Prophet's knowing permission, which would not have been granted had this been so. Moreover, God would not teach such a person directly from His presence.

At this juncture of the passage, Ibn 'Arabi begins to broaden the discussion to the People of the Book in general:

> If he is one who pays the poll-tax (*al-jizya*), we would say that the Muhammadan law (*al-sharʿ al-muḥammadī*) acknowledges his religion as long as he gives the poll-tax—*this is a specific matter of Muhammad's universal messengership* (*ʿumūm risāla*). Indeed, with

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[214] E.g., Ibid., 170. (Fut. I, 135).

[215] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 274 (Fut. I, 225).

Muhammad's appearance the only law that remained was his law, which acknowledges the People of the Book's law as long as they give the poll-tax.[216]

Thus, when the discussion finally settles down to a more general conversation about the People of the Book, we find a succinct assertion of his doctrine of qualified subjugation found within the Nābigha passage above—i.e., that by obeying the Qur'anic command of subjugation through paying the poll-tax, the People of the Book are subsumed into the Muhammadan dispensation and allowed to remain upon their law.[217]

Ibn 'Arabi again makes recourse to the doctrine of qualified subjugation as part of his metaphysical cosmography of supersessionism in a section of the *Futūḥāt* elucidating how all of "the prophets in this universe" have been the deputies (*nuwwāb*) of Muhammad. Here, Ibn 'Arabi concisely recapitulates his entire metaphysical cosmology of Muhammad beginning with "his rank as a spirit (*rūh*) before the origination of his human bodily form," when he was, according to the hadith as quoted above from the *Fuṣūṣ*, "a prophet when Adam was between water and clay."[218] Thus according to Ibn 'Arabi, the "spiritual presence (*rūḥāniyya*)" of Muhammad "was with each prophet and messenger" during their prophetic career, and "he brought them assistance through his pure spirit, which manifested within their revealed laws (*al-sharāʾiʿ*) and branches of knowledge (*al-ʿulūm*) in the time of their

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[216] Ibid.

[217] Ibn 'Arabi's treatment of Ibn Barthalmā above is briefly discussed by Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints* 78-79. Chodkiewicz concludes by noting that Ibn 'Arabi's final recourse to the *jizya* serves as an exoteric way out for saints like Ibn Barthalmā who belonged to previous revelations abrogated by the advent of Muhammad. According to Chodkiewicz, through the payment of the *jizya* the People of the Book "are integrated into the Islamic order of things, and by this very fact their own Law, which theoretically has been invalidated by the coming of Islam, re-aquires for them a validity which is so to speak derivative. Nevertheless, as we may gather from the reference to the *jizya*, we are no longer speaking of anchorites, who by definition are outside the norms of a community, but of individuals who are, technically, 'infidels'." Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 79.

[218] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 170 (Fut. I, 134).

existence as messengers."[219] Here, Ibn 'Arabi explains that because Muhammad "did not

exist in the sensory world in the beginning, each law is associated with whom it was sent.

Yet in reality, each is the revealed law of Muhammad (*sharʿ muḥammad*)."[220] Thus, Ibn

'Arabi clarifies that even though the Muhammadan Reality was in effect the source of these

laws, they were still abrogated by the coming of Muhammad's sharia when he physically

manifested:

> As for God having abrogated all of the laws by Muhammad's law, this abrogation has
> nothing to do (with the fact that) the previous revealed laws (*sharāʾiʿ*) were from his revealed
> law (*sharʿ*). For indeed, God has made us witness to his outward law as revealed to him, God
> bless him and grant him peace, in the Qur'an and the Sunna that abrogation (*al-naskh*) is with
> our (community's) consensus, and we are also in agreement that the previous abrogated law
> was his law sent by him to us (through previous prophets). So that which comes later
> abrogated that which came before. Thus, this abrogation, as found in the Qur'an and the
> Sunna, alerts us to the fact that all of the previous revealed laws (*sharāʾiʿ*) that have been
> abrogated were not separate from Muhammad's law.[221]

Here, Ibn 'Arabi's conception of Muhammadan supersessionism emerges *as a metaphysical*

tautology: while all prophetic laws are in essence Muhammad's law, they are nevertheless in

the end abrogated by Muhammad's final dispensation. That is, of course, except for the laws

of the People of the Book, which Ibn 'Arabi again mentions here. Thus, he states that "when

Jesus, peace be upon him, will descend at the end of time, he will rule by other than his own

law, *except for a portion of what he ruled with in the time of his own message*."[222] As such,

Ibn 'Arabi asserts that Jesus' "rule will be by the Muhammadan Law (*al-sharʿ al-*

muḥammadī) as established today," but "the protected people (*ahl al-dhimma*) from the

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[219] Ibid., (Fut. I, 135).

[220] Ibid.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Ibid.

People of the Book" will follow their own law as long as they "*give the poll tax* (jizya) *in a willing state of subjugation.*"[223]

Conclusion

It would be easy to speculate, as Ibn ʿArabi's preeminent Western biographer Claude Addas has, that the ongoing Crusades and the steady progress gained by Christian armies in Andalusia during Ibn ʿArabi's lifetime influenced his exclusivist attitudes towards the People of the Book. Indeed, in the same year that Ibn ʿArabi penned his letter to Kaykāʾus the Almohads were defeated at Las Navas de Tolosa, marking a turning point for the *Reconquista*.[224] Yet, as Talal Asad notes, "Meanings are never simply generated by a cultural logic; they belong variously to conventional projects, occasional intentions, natural events, and so on. For theologians such as Augustine and al-Ghazali, *they also relate to all encompassing divine projects.*"[225] Thus regardless of its "origins," which seems to entail all of the above (*not least of which theological*), this chapter has shown that such Islamic absolutism displayed in his letter to Kaykāʾus lies at the very discursive center of Ibn ʿArabi's metaphysical anthropology, cosmology, and cosmography.

As will be discussed in chapter 2, Chittick's translation of (and accompanying commentary on) Fut. III, 153 as a proof-text for Ibn ʿArabi's rejection of abrogation has become a focal point for a post-9/11 universalist field of translation that claims Ibn ʿArabi as rejecting the classical doctrine of Islamic abrogative supersessionism. Yet, as is evinced by

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[223] Ibid., (Fut. I, 134-5).

[224] As Addas notes, Ibn ʿArabi's words to Kaykāʾus were addressed by "a Muslim who was quite justifiably disturbed by the conquests being made by the Christian armies, and was afraid of possible collusion with those armies on the part of their autochthonous co-religionists." Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 235.

[225] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 13 (emphasis mine).

Ibn 'Arabi's reference to the panegyric verses of Nābigha elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt*, such

claims are *severely misleading*. Indeed, Ibn 'Arabi's use of Nābigha's metaphor of a

triumphant solar king who subsumes the light of his rivals is representative of Ibn 'Arabi's

entire metaphysical ethos and can even be found underlying his celebrated *Tarjumān* verses

and their assertion of a heart "capable of every form." From this perspective, Ibn 'Arabi's

"religion of love"—with its attendant commentary noting Muhammad as God's beloved who

subsumes all prophetic "meanings"—surfaces as first and foremost a religion based upon the

"triumph" of the Muhammadan heir as the comprehensive *logoic* witness of God's

theophanic form(s). Moreover, rather than holding exoteric religious form as secondary to

such witnessing, Ibn 'Arabi's heteronomous focus on law frames his understanding of the

Muhammadan Reality and its historical manifestation; such focus thus emerges as primary to

his "mysticism."

In a synoptic passage found within the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn 'Arabi summarizes the spiritual

supremacy of the Prophet Muhammad in terms of Nābigha's metaphor of a solar king. Here,

Ibn 'Arabi states:

> Know that since God made the station (*manzil*) of Muhammad—blessings and peace be upon
> him—that of lordship (*sīyāda*), he is master (*sayyid*). He who is other than him is of (his)
> subjects. We have thus understood that he is matchless, for indeed subjects cannot compare to
> their kings—they have a special station and (their) subjects theirs.[226]

Ibn 'Arabi goes on to state the now familiar assertion that Muhammad has held his sovereign

station before the creation of Adam. He thus claims that through his particular station of "the

comprehensive words" (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*), Muhammad has been the source of "help (*al-

mumidd*) for every Perfect Human Being (*insān kāmil*)," beginning with Adam through "a

continuous succession of vicegerents" until Muhammad's historical appearance "in order for

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[226] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 5, 164 (Fut. III, 142).

the wisdoms of his station to manifest by the confluence of his birth."[227] As such, Ibn ʿArabi

asserts "*When he appeared, it was like the sun subsumed in its light all light*."[228] He thus

concludes:

> So he confirmed from the revealed laws (*sharāʾi ʿ*) of his (prior) deputies what he confirmed and he abrogated from them what he abrogated. Thus, his care for his community manifested through his appearance and presence—although the entire human and fiery (*al-insānī wa al-nārī*)[229] world is his community. But Muhammad's community is attributed with special characteristics. God made them "*the best community ever to be brought forth for humanity*."[230] This grace was given through the bestowal of Muhammad's birth (among them). So, it was because of the grace given to this community over the other communities that He gave His vicegerents their rank in the world before Muhammad's appearance.[231]

As I have attempted to show above, and will argue in the chapters that follow,

discursive attempts to separate Ibn ʿArabi's so-called socio-political positions about the

People of the Book (as represented by his letter to Kaykāʾus) from his "esotericism" should

be more closely interrogated for embedded post-Enlightenment presuppositions about

essential oppositions between the "esoteric" and the "exoteric," the "mystical" and the

"political," the "religious" and the "secular," and "law" and "belief." While many have

speculated that Ibn ʿArabi's sharia orientation that frames his metaphysics is simply a

political expedient, I have shown here that his discourse itself is coherently otherwise.[232]

Such fecund medieval Islamic thought cannot be dissociated from the socio-political

environment that it was formed within, since such an environment is itself consequential of

its own discourse. For in the "universe of representations," as Daniel Dubuisson reminds us,

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[227] Ibid.

[228] Ibid.

[229] I.e., that of the *jinn*.

[230] Qur'an 3:110.

[231] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 5, 164 (Fut. III, 142).

[232] See p. 26n10 above.

"each thing is at one and the same time constituted by everything that surrounds it and is itself constituent […].*"*[233]

Indeed, we do not have to travel far from home to see other examples of such mystical communalism. Ibn Sabʿīn (d. 1270), one of Ibn ʿArabi's immediate Andalusian metaphysical successors, has been heralded as working within an "interconfessional" mode because of his so-called "universal" Hermeticism. [234] Upon closer inspection, however, Ibn Sabʿīn displays a very similar supersessionist position to that of Ibn ʿArabi, stating that "None of the outstanding qualities of this our religion has been heard of as accorded to more ancient religions, and nothing of the sort has been reported about them. The sciences of ancient religions have traced the ways toward our religion."[235] Not only does Ibn Sabʿīn praise Islam and Muhammad's prophethood as superseding all former religions, he exhorts the Jews and Christians to acknowledge this fact.[236]

While this chapter has fleshed out an argument against a particular universalist interpretation of Ibn ʿArabi that has become regnant in the last several decades, its foundational insights are not altogether new. As I argue above, the preeminent scholar of Sufism Annemarie Schimmel's perceptions regarding Ibn ʿArabi's "religion of love," *pace* Michael Sells, prove perspicacious. Indeed, Schimmel seems to have well understood the

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[233] Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 38-39 (emphasis mine).

[234] Vincent J. Cornell, "The All-Comprehensive Circle (al-Iḥāṭa): Soul, Intellect, and the Oneness of Existence in the Doctrine of Ibn Sabʿīn," in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 33-34. Although there is a debate whether Ibn Sabʿīn was directly influenced by Ibn ʿArabi or not, he seems to have been the first to use the term "the unity of being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), which is often claimed to have originated with Ibn ʿArabi. See William Chittick, "Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*," in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rūmī*, ed. Amin Banani, Richard Hovannisian, and Georges Sabagh (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 82-83.

[235] Ibn Sabʿīn quoted in Keller, "Perceptions of Other Religions," 190.

[236] Keller, "Perceptions of Other Religions," 190.

situated and supersessionist nature of the metaphysical anthropology, cosmology, and cosmography that issued out of Ibn 'Arabi's discourse. As such, she warns:

> One should […] never forget that even the most ardent defenders of *waḥdat al-wujūd* agreed that the person of the Prophet Muhammad was the locus of the manifestations of the Divine Names, the 'Perfect Man' *par excellence*, the highest model of humanity whom to imitate is the first and foremost duty of the believer. <u>And Islam remained for all of them the last and most comprehensive Divine revelation which comprises in itself, and hence abolishes, the laws brought by every previous Prophet. The 'tolerance' of Islamic mysticism consists of its embracing all religions under the crown of the final revelation which was granted to Muhammad.</u>[237]

Yet, the reality of such mystical absolutism should not surprise since the bases of its supersessionism are to be found within the very foundations of the discursive position of medieval Islam itself. As Hodgson is quoted above: "Islam was to bring the true and uncorrupted divine guidance to all mankind, creating a world-wide society in which the true revelation would be the everyday norm of all the nations." Thus Hodgson asserts, "*The difference between Islam and the other communities was that Islam was first to rule over and then to supersede all others*." While, such a depiction of Islamic supersessionism seems to rest purely on "exoteric" socio-political power dynamics, it is clear that Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics is infused with such totalizing cosmographic concerns. Indeed, the Andalusian Sufi's monistic discourse blurs the boundaries between divine ocean and earthly shore, making modern attempts to decisively distinguish between religious, mystical, and socio-political anchorage points not only anachronistic, but analytically misleading.

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[237] Annemarie Schimmel, *Pain and Grace: A Study of Two Mystical Writers of Eighteenth-Century Muslim India* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 6 (underline mine).

CHAPTER TWO

MAKING STARS SUNS:
IBN 'ARABI IN THE LIGHT OF SCHUONIAN PERENNIALISM

One is not born traditional; one chooses to become traditional by constant innovation.[1]

Is there not in all religions more or less of the true nature of religion [...]?[2]

It has become impossible to provide an effective defense for a single religion against all the others [...]; to persist in doing so [...] is a little like wishing to maintain the Ptolemaic system against the evidence of verified and verifiable astronomical data.[3]

In his 1945 masterwork, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*,[4] the

French Traditionalist René Guénon (d. 1951) footnotes Ibn 'Arabi's celebrated *Tarjumān*

verses that boast of a heart "capable of every form" as an exemplary description of an adept

who has "penetrated to the principal unity of all the traditions" and thus is "no longer tied to

any particular traditional form."[5] Fifteen years later, Guénon's intellectual and spiritual heir,

Frithjof Schuon (d. 1998), would similarly reference the same verses in his best known

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[1] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 76.

[2] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., ltd., 1893), 216.

[3] Frithjof Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence: A New Translation with Selected Letters*, trans. Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge, and James S. Cutsinger, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009), 4.

[4] First published *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps* (Gallimard, 1945); *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* (Luzac & Co., 1953).

[5] René Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne, 4th ed. (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 62-3, 63n1.

monograph on Islam, *Understanding Islam*,[6] as a proof-text for what had become his signature idea, i.e., the universal validity of religions.[7] Here, Schuon notes that each religion speaks an "exclusive language" because the differences between religions correspond to the differences between people. Thus, "if the religions are true it is because each time it is God who has spoken, and if they are different, it is because God has spoken in different 'languages' in conformity with the diversity of the receptacles."[8] And as for the problem of each religion's supposed absolute exclusivity? Schuon answers: "it is because in each of them God has said 'I'."[9]

Anticipating the demurral of the "orthodox," Schuon invokes the metaphysical authority of Ibn 'Arabi and his *Tarjumān* verses as "Islamic" evidence for the Guénonian notion of "universal orthodoxy":

> *We know all too well, and it is moreover in the natural order of things, that this thesis is not acceptable on the level of exoteric orthodoxies, but is so on the level of universal orthodoxy*, that to which Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, the great enunciator of gnosis in Islam, bore witness in these terms: "My heart is open to every form: it is a pasture for gazelles, and a cloister for Christian monks, a temple for idols, the Kaaba of the pilgrim, the tables of the Torah, and the book of the Quran. I practice the religion of Love; in whatsoever direction His caravans advance, the religion of Love shall be my religion and my faith."[10]

After twenty years, Schuon would once again call upon the Andalusian Sufi to help exposit the Perennial Religion (*religio perennis*) and its epistemological method of "*gnosis*" by alluding to the same lines:

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[6] First published *Comprendre l'Islam* (Gallimard, 1961); *Understanding Islam* (Allen & Unwin, 1963).

[7] This idea was originally put forth in Schuon's first book: *De l' Unité transcendante des religions* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948); *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, trans. Peter Townsend (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

[8] Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1998), 36.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 36-37 (emphasis mine).

The *religio perennis* is fundamentally this: the Real entered into the illusory so that the illusory might be able to return into the Real. It is this mystery, together with the metaphysical discernment and contemplative concentration that are its complement, which alone is important in an absolute sense from the point of view of *gnosis*; for the gnostic—in the etymological and rightful sense of that word—there is in the last analysis no other "religion". It is what Ibn Arabi called the "religion of Love" […].[11]

While Ibn 'Arabi and his ideas are often invoked by Guénon and Schuon as representative of the Primordial Tradition or the Perennial Religion, assertions that Ibn 'Arabi's thought was formative in the creation of the Western Perennialist tradition under their successive leadership appear to be overblown.[12] Yet, in the wake of 9/11 there has been a spate of Perennialist leaning articles and books that focus on the thought of Ibn 'Arabi and its usefulness in the context of contemporary religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue. Many of these books specifically compare Ibn 'Arabi with supposed pre-modern universalists of other faiths—most typically his assumed medieval Christian counterpart the Dominican theologian Meister Eckhart (d. 1327).[13]

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[11] Frithjof Schuon, *Light on the Ancient Worlds* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 120. Originally published as *Regards sur les mondes anciens* (Editions traditionnelles, 1980).

[12] Most recently, Thierry Zarcone asserted that "the doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi clearly influenced" Guénon and Schuon through Balyānī's *Risālat al-aḥadiyya*, as wrongly attributed to Ibn 'Arabi by Ivan Aguéli (and others). Thierry Zarcone, "Rereadings and Transformations of Sufism in the West," *Diogenes* 47, no. 187 (1999): 117. As will be discussed further in chapter 3, Schuon's frustration with Ibn 'Arabi's Ashʿarism and "Semitic" literalism, in the final analysis, seems to inspire more of his distain than praise. While it is clear that *Risālat al-aḥadiyya* serves an important role in the oeuvre of both Guénon and Schuon, Schuon's major inspiration from Ibn 'Arabi appears to have come from either his particular reading of the *Fuṣūṣ* or ʿAbd al-Razzaq al-Qāshānī's commentary misattributed to Ibn 'Arabi; see chapter 3, p. 221n285. For a thorough treatment of the doctrinal differences and historical consequences of the misattribution of Balyānī's text see Chodkiewicz's introduction and detailed notes in Awḥad al-Dīn Balyānī, *Epître sur l'Unicité Absolue*, trans. Michel Chodkiewicz (Paris: Les Deux Oceans, 1982).

[13] Such material has been generally published under similar titles, which often share the same translated passages of Ibn 'Arabi; e.g., Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence: According to Shankara, Ibn Arabi, and Meister Eckhart* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006); Ghasem Kakaie, "Interreligious Dialogue: Ibn 'Arabi and Meister Eckhart," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 45 (2009): 45-63; Robert J. Dobie, *Logos and Revelation: Ibn 'Arabi, Meister Eckhart, and Mystical Hermeneutics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010); Sayafaatun Almirzanah, *When Mystic Masters Meet: Towards a New Matrix for Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (New York: Blue Dome, 2011). For a critical comparison of the doctrines of Ibn Arabi and Meister Eckhart most often claimed to be nearly synonymous see Ian Almond, "Divine Needs, Divine Illusions: Preliminary Remarks Toward a Comparative Study of Meister Eckhart and Ibn Al'Arabi," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001): 263–82.

Writing in the foreword to Sayafaatun Almirzanah's *When Mystic Masters Meet* (the

most recent iteration of this now standard comparison), Islamic studies scholar John Esposito

observes that in the wake of globalization and the communication revolution, there is an

increasing need within "multi-religious nation states" for inclusivity and interfaith dialogue.

In order to avoid the pitfalls of irreconcilable religious doctrine, however, Esposito calls for

"a *new* matrix" of interfaith dialogue that acknowledges difference, while being "firmly

rooted in shared spiritual experiences."[14] As proof of traditional precedents to such an

innovative approach, Ibn 'Arabi's ideas—along with those of his Dominican analog Meister

Eckhart—are here claimed by Esposito to be a type of "spirituality" that emphasizes the

"Oneness of Being/God" over the theology and doctrine of "believers and religious

institutions" who use "finite, limited language to describe the ineffable."[15] The separation of

a formless essence from formal doctrine is thus assumed to be at the core of Ibn 'Arabi's

thought in *When Mystic Masters Meet*. As Almirzanah subsequently notes, Ibn 'Arabi's way

is epitomized by the separation of a unitive and singular "primordial ideal religion" (*dīn*)

from the "various 'paths' or 'laws' […]" of religious traditions.[16]

Indeed, such a dissociation of a *sui generis* religious "essence" from historical

contexts, discursive traditions, and embodied practices is emblematic of the modern

emergence of depoliticized theology and the attendant construction of a universal category of

religion "as a transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon."[17] In her 1997 foreword to

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[14] John L. Esposito, foreword to *When Mystic Masters Meet*, xii.

[15] Ibid., xiii.

[16] Almirzanah, *When Mystic Masters Meet*, 212.

[17] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 28. Regarding the depoliticization of modern theology see Hugh

Schuon's revised edition of *Understanding Islam*, Annemarie Schimmel perspicaciously

observes that "Religion" for Schuon is "something *sui generis*," which Schimmel goes on to

note "cannot be described in scholarly technical terms and whose goal is not to tackle social

and political problems […]."[18] Rather, for Schuon, religion's job is "to guide humankind to a

spiritual level on which all problems are seen" through the "the eternal wisdom" of God.[19] In

the same year that Schimmel penned these reflections, Russell McCutcheon published his

well-known monograph *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and*

the Politics of Nostalgia. Building on the work of Wayne Proudfoot and J. Z. Smith,

McCutcheon traces the discourse on *sui generis* religion through a long standing tradition of

German Protestant scholarship going back to Friedrich Schleiermacher (d. 1834).[20] Indeed, as

Wilfred Cantwell Smith notes, Schleiermacher's 1799 work *Über die Religion* (On Religion)

appears to be "the first book ever written on religion *as such* […]."[21] As McCutcheon

observes, the conceptual category of "religion" in *sui generis* terms "constitutes a private,

interiorized dimension of experience that, although manifested outwardly in varying forms, is

shared across all religions regardless of their historical differences."[22]

Nicholson, *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 50.

[18] Annemarie Schimmel, foreword to *Understanding Islam*, by Frithjof Schuon (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1998), v.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 57, 60.

[21] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 45 (emphasis mine).

[22] McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 60.

With the general antipathy many Perennialist authors who sanctify "tradition" have

for liberal Protestantism, a comparison with Schleiermacher's discourse of *sui generis*

religion may seem strained.[23] While the metaphysical framework of Schuonian Perennialism

is ostensibly at odds with Schleiermacherian liberalism, in terms of discursive practice such

differences are surprisingly formal.[24] Indeed, the type of non-reductionist universalism

inaugurated by Schleiermacher's recognition of individual religious formation finds

important thematic and strategic echoes in Schuon.[25] Moreover, both positions concede that

the conflicting practices, beliefs, and laws of religious traditions are simultaneously validated

and transcended by an underlying religious "essence" that unites them.[26] Thus, in discussing

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[23] E.g., René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World* (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 61-2; and Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam: Perspectives on Esoteric Ecumenism*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2008), 23, 32n11.

[24] Indeed, much like Schuonian Perennialism, Schleiermacher's notion of God consciousness is grounded within a Neoplatonic notion that all things are reflective of a transcendent reality grounded within a unified cosmos. Where Schleiermacher most differs from the Perennialists, however, is his "modern" turn toward an immanent progressivism. Following a Hegelian-like historical teleology, Schleiermacher sees the divine Spirit (*heiliger Geist*) working through human culture and religion in a melioristic fashion. As Jens Zimmermann notes, for Schleiermacher, "the assumption of an organic teleology intrinsic to human nature tends to blur the distinction between culture and Spirit." Jens Zimmermann, *Humanism and Religion: A Call for the Renewal of Western Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 148. For Schuon, however, true religion *qua* esoterism understands Reality in starkly Neoplatonic terms as the necessary source of all contingent realities. The unity of the one Reality is that which is expressed by all religions, but as such is hidden from the slumbering consciousness of humanity and is, in general, negatively related to human culture, which is in this view progressively degenerative. See Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude, *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 84.

[25] E.g., regarding revelation Schleiermacher states, "Every sacred writing is in itself a glorious production, a speaking monument from the heroic time of religion, but, through servile reverence, it would become merely a mausoleum, a monument that a great spirit once was there, but is now no more. […] Not every person has religion who believes in a sacred writing, but only the man who has a lively and immediate understanding of it, and who, therefore, so far as he himself is concerned, could most easily do without it." Moreover, even though Schleiermacher provisionally accepts the possibility of "producing" a new religion for the person whom the existing forms are not adequate, he qualifies this notion by asserting that "[m]ost men, following their nature, will belong to an existing form, and there will be only few whom none suffices." Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 91, 224-5.

[26] Both Schleiermacher and Schuon ultimately reject rational epistemology and morality as a basis of religious "truth" and agree that since the religions are diverse and conflictive, the essence of religion is accessed through unmediated intuitive "feeling" (for Schleiermacher) or "gnosis" (for Schuon).

Ibn 'Arabi's so-called doctrine of religious diversity, Reza Shah-Kazemi, who writes openly

from a Schuonian perspective, notes:

> The logical concomitant of the view that all religious paths are validated by their divine origin and goal is that this divine element—as Essence—transcends the religious forms emerging therefrom and leading thereto. In other words, the distinction between religious form and divine Essence at one and the same time validates the form as a means of access to the Essence whilst also highlighting the inevitable relativity of all such forms in the face of the Essence.[27]

While chapter 3 will be concerned to flesh out some of the more exclusivist presuppositions

underlying such essentialist strategies of religious universalism, this chapter throws into

relief a dominant Schuonian Perennialist discursive regime in the Western construction of

Ibn 'Arabi and Sufism. Not only has Schuon's discourse been seminal in the association of

Ibn 'Arabi with transhistorical and transcultural formations of "universal validity" and

religious pluralism, it continues to inform the discourses of new generations of scholars.

This chapter thus proceeds in roughly two parts. The first historicizes Schuonian

Perennialism and establishes its prominence within the contemporary Western interpretation

of Ibn 'Arabi. Through a comparison with the universalism of Schleiermacher, Schuonian

Perennialism is here situated within a modern "experiential-expressivist" model notable for

its "Copernican" turn away from premodern models of religious absolutism. After a brief

excursus on the distinction between soteriological and epistemological "universalism" in

relation to Ibn 'Arabi's thought, the second part resumes the close readings of Ibn 'Arabi's

discourse on the People of the Book that began in chapter 1 and compares them with

particularly determinative assertions made by Ibn 'Arabi's foremost contemporary Schuonian

commentators.

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[27] Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence*, 123.

While chapter 1 established Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of abrogation (*naskh*) and the

qualified subjugation of the People of the Book through the payment of the poll-tax (*jizya*), it

also revealed that Ibn 'Arabi did acknowledge that the religions of the People of the Book

maintain a mode of "validity," although inferior to the Muslims. Building on the more

generalized Middle Period intellectual historicization offered in chapter 1, in what follows I

historicize Ibn 'Arabi's positions on the People of the Book from within the local context of

his Andalusian home of Seville and his intellectual engagement with the theological and

juridical discourse of the polemical polymath Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064). In light of such a

historicization, the remainder of this chapter explores traditional polemical debates regarding

the "validity" of pre-Qur'anic scripture and Ibn 'Arabi's subsequent position on the

corruption (*taḥrīf*) of previous revelation. Here, I show that Ibn 'Arabi holds that the

scriptures of the People of the Book are textually corrupted and not simply wrongly

interpreted as the Schuonian Perennialists claim. This chapter concludes by returning to the

issue of the "validity" of the People of the Book brought up in chapter 1 and shows that

through their willing subjugation they attain felicity. Such findings thus directly challenge

the Perennialist notion that for Ibn 'Arabi religious achievement is attained through a gnostic

response to a "valid" set of revealed symbols that transcend heteronomous frameworks of

authority and obedience.

Ibn 'Arabi, the Perennialist "Tradition," and the Importance of Schuon

Writing in 1909 under the pseudonym Palingénius at the start of a career as one of the

most influential twentieth-century European esotericists,[28] René Guénon disparaged occult

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[28] Guénon assumed this name while serving as the holy bishop for the Gnostic Church in Paris. See William Quinn, "Guénon, René Jean Marie Joseph," *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 442. On Guénon's influence see ibid., 444-45.

"doctrines" as spiritually ineffective and ultimately leading to "absurd consequences."

Rather, he posited an esoteric quest for "*gnosis*," which he claimed was beyond the purview

of any type of systematization: "Gnosis in its broadest and highest sense is knowledge; true

gnosticism cannot be a school or a particular system, but it is above all the search for the

integral Truth."[29] According to Guénon, the only reliable guide for the attainment of *gnosis*

was the "the orthodox Tradition contained in the sacred books of all peoples [. . .]."[30] Such

"orthodox Tradition," Guénon claimed, was "the same everywhere, despite its various forms

appropriate for every race and era."[31] Throughout the next decade, Guénon gradually

dissociated himself from the occult movement of fin de siècle France by developing his

peculiar concept of "orthodox Tradition,"[32] which he would come to call the "Primordial

Tradition" (*la Tradition primordial*). The Primordial Tradition would become synonymous

with such terms as *philosophia perennis, sophia perennis,* and *religio perennis* that came to

mark the contemporary esoteric movement of Perennialism popularized by Frithjof Schuon.[33]

Guénon and Schuon are commonly viewed as the "dual originators and expositors"[34]

of what is variously referred to as Traditionalism or Perennialism.[35] It has even recently been

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[29] Palingénius (R. Guénon), "La Gnose et les écoles spiritualistes," *La Gnose*, no. 2 (1909): 20.

[30] Ibid., 21.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Martin Lings notes that Guénon's particular spiritual "function" was "to remind twentieth century man of the need for orthodoxy […]." According to Lings, Guénon restored to the world the "original meaning" of orthodoxy as a "rectitude of opinion […] which compels the intelligent man not merely to reject heresy, but also to recognize the validity of all those faiths which conform to those criteria on which his own faith depends for its orthodoxy." Martin Lings, introduction to *The essential René Guénon: Metaphysics, Tradition, and the Crisis of Modernity*, by René Guénon, ed. John Herlihy (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009), xxvi-vii.

[33] Regarding the origins of the "Perennial Philosophy" (*philosophia perennis*) see the introduction to this study, p. 4n12.

[34] William Stoddart, foreword to *René Guénon: Some Observations*, by Frithjof Schuon, ed. William Stoddart (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004), xi.

asserted, in evangelical-like fashion, that "Guénon was the pioneer, and Schuon the fulfillment."[36] Indeed, Perennialism developed from an intellectual movement into a full fledged "initiatic tradition" when Schuon took on the mantle of spiritual guide (i.e., shaykh) for the ʿAlāwiyya Sufi order at the end of 1936,[37] which became the ʿAlāwiyya Maryamiyya in the mid 1960s due to his special devotion to the Virgin Mary.[38] After Guénon's death in 1951, "Schuon gradually assumed the role of the premier expositor of the *philosophia perennis* […]."[39]

Yet, Schuon critically distinguished his version of Perennialism from Guénonian Traditionalism. Unlike the strict French Catholic upbringing of his predecessor, Schuon was brought up in the Lutheran Church in Basel, Switzerland until he converted to Catholicism at the age of fourteen at the request of his dying father. His early interest in Orientalism was complemented by a wide reading in German romanticism from his father's library.[40] Schuon's ecumenical upbringing in tandem with his interest in German romanticism no doubt influenced his evolution from the insularism of Guénon's metaphysics and his rejection of the "anti-traditional" West. Indeed, Schuon's most significant difference with Guénon revolved around the validity of Christian initiation. He strongly disagreed with

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[35] Traditionalism is more commonly associated with Guénon and Perennialism with Schuon; see p. 103n45 below.

[36] Stoddart, foreword to *René Guénon*, xi.

[37] Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon*, 23; see the introduction to this study, p. 3n10.

[38] For a non-hagiographical, albeit tendentious, biography of Schuon's role as Sufi shaykh and leader of a Universalist religious movement see Mark J. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 73-94, 147-77.

[39] William Quinn, "Schuon, Frithjof (also known as Shaykh ʿIsâ Nur al-Dîn Ahmad al-Shâdhilî al-Darqâwî al-ʿAlawî al-Maryamî)," *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1044.

[40] Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon*, 5, 7, 10.

Guénon's contention that the Church had lost its early connection to esotericism.[41] Indeed, Schuon's redemption of Western forms of spirituality within the Traditionalist framework included "orthodox" Protestantism, i.e., Lutheranism, which according to Schuon, "incontestably manifests a Christian possibility—a limited one, no doubt, and excessive through certain of its features, but not intrinsically illegitimate and therefore representative of certain theological, moral, and even mystical values."[42] In a 1982 letter, Schuon wrote regarding Lutheranism: "It cannot be pure heresy. . . . Its priorities are simplicity, inwardness and trust in God; *nothing else touched me in my early childhood*."[43]

Schuon's ecumenism would come to uniquely define his approach, which, as Paul Sérant notes, "above all intends to show the profound agreement between Eastern and Western traditions [...]."[44] Nevertheless, the importance of "the Guénonian message" as a precursor to Schuon's lifework and self-image is without question and was contextualized by Schuon himself in spiritual terms.[45] Indeed, as John Herlihy notes, Guénon's emphasis on the Primordial Tradition as the source of the "world religions"

> prepared the way for an understanding of what Frithjof Schuon described as "the transcendent unity" of the world's religious traditions, wherein each religion casts the same universal truth within the mold of an individual form that suits a particular mentality and a given era.[46]

[41] Excepting some forms of Freemasonry, Guénon saw the West as entirely devoid of initiatic traditions. For Schuon's criticisms on Guénon, see Frithjof Schuon, *René Guénon: Some Observations*, ed. William Stoddart (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004). In regards to Christianity as a valid initiatic path see ibid., 37-47.

[42] Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam: Perspectives on Esoteric Ecumenism*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2008), 23.

[43] Frithjof Schuon quoted in Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon*, 7 (emphasis mine).

[44] Paul Sérant, "Frithjof Schuon and René Guénon," in *René Guénon: Some Observations*, by Frithjof Schuon, ed. William Stoddart (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 59.

[45] Indeed, Schuon saw his own "initiatic function" as a shaykh to be "the 'providential complement' of the Guénonian message," since "Guénon had never been conferred with an initiatic function." Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon*, 67, 161n70.

[46] John Herlihy, preface to *The essential René Guénon: Metaphysics, Tradition, and the Crisis of Modernity*, by René Guénon, ed. John Herlihy (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009), xi.

Here, Herlihy makes direct reference to Schuon's 1948 publication *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (De l'Unité transcendante des Religions), which as mentioned in the introduction to this study has become the emblematic phrase of Schuon's lifework and is often associated with the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi. For example, a recent Perennialist monograph on Sufism claims that *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* is in reality an "allusive" presentation of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas.[47] Indeed, in an important 1972 essay, Seyyed Hossein Nasr—an overt initiate of Schuon's ʿAlāwiyya[48]— describes Sufism as the Islamic vehicle for the attainment of the Schuonian ideal with Ibn 'Arabi at the helm:

> The Sufi is one who seeks to transcend the world of forms, to journey from multiplicity to Unity, from the particular to the Universal. He leaves the many for the One and through this very process is granted the vision of the One in the many. For him all forms become transparent, including religious forms, thus revealing to him their unique origin. Sufism or Islamic gnosis is the most universal affirmation of that perennial wisdom which stands at the heart of Islam and in fact of all religion as such. It is this supreme doctrine of Unity—which is itself unique (*al-tawḥîd wâḥid*)—that the Sufis call the 'religion of love' and to which Ibn 'Arabî refers in his well-known verses in the *Tarjumân al-ashwâq*. This love is not merely sentiment or emotions, it is the realized aspect of gnosis. It is a transcendent knowledge that reveals the inner unity of religions.[49]

Given such associations of the Schuonian notion of the "transcendent unity of religions" with Ibn 'Arabi's discourse, it is perhaps not surprising that both Guénon and Schuon—as the "dual expositors" of Perennialism—have been compared to the Andalusian Sufi himself.[50] Furthermore, such associations go some way to explaining why post-9/11 the conceptual

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[47] See Eric Geoffroy, *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2010), 187.

[48] William C. Chittick, introduction to *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007), xi.

[49] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 146-7 (underline mine).

[50] See Pietro Nutrizio, "Rene Guenon: A Biographical Note," in René Guénon, *The Lord of the World: Le Roi du monde* (Ripon: Coombe Springs Press, 1983), 68; and Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon*, 72.

legacy of Schuonian Perennialism has been so intertwined with the thought of Ibn 'Arabi, interfaith dialogue, and pluralistic approaches to the Qur'an.[51] Yet, the academic use of Schuonian Perennialism to present Ibn 'Arabi's ideas has not simply been a post-9/11 phenomena.

As William Chittick recently points out, Nasr's "strong endorsement of the writings of Schuon" in three of his first English books published in the mid 1960s by Harvard University Press proved "instrumental in bringing the traditionalist school to the notice of official academia."[52] In *Three Muslim Sages*, the first of the Harvard publications, Nasr spends an entire chapter focusing on Ibn 'Arabi where he forcefully asserts that "[a]ll attempts at a profound rapprochement with the other religions made by Muslims today can and *should be based* on the rich foundations prepared by Ibn 'Arabī and Rūmī."[53] Yet, as late as 1986 in the first installment of a widely respected three-part scholarly article on Ibn 'Arabi, James Morris lamented that there was still no adequate introductory study of the "essential 'rhetorical' aspect of Ibn ʿArabī's writings," which "unites many methods, styles, and traditional subjects in view of certain recurrent spiritual intentions […]."[54] But Morris

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[51] See p. 94n13 above. Added to this list should be Shah-Kazemi's *The Other in the Light of the One*, where Ibn 'Arabi's ideas as interpreted from within a Perennialist framework play a central role. Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Qur'ān and Interfaith Dialogue* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2006).

[52] William C. Chittick, introduction to *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007), xiii. Sedgwick has recently noted the ubiquitous presence of Schuonian Perennialism within Western publishing houses since 1950: "In the period 1950–99 Schuon and 23 other identified followers published some 220 books. Eighty of these were well enough received to be translated into other languages (135 translations in total) or to go into new editions. Thirty were major works […]." Mark J. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 167.

[53] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Ibn 'Arabī* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1964), 117 (emphasis mine).

[54] James W Morris, "Ibn ʿArabī and His Interpreters. Part I: Recent French Translations" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106, no. 3 (1986): 541n8.

importantly qualified this assertion, noting that:

> the best illustration of the needed sensitivity to that crucial dimension of Ibn ʿArabī's writing, usually phrased in terms of comments on "Sufism" in general, is to be found in the various collections of essays by F. Schuon on Islamic subjects […]. However, those reflections generally presuppose a great familiarity with both the writings of Ibn ʿArabī and the broader Sufi traditions of which they are a part.[55]

More recently, Morris importantly observes what he notes as "the profound effect of the abundant writings of F. Schuon in applying the central ideas of Ibn 'Arabī to *articulating* (but in the long run also deeply shaping) an understanding of the spiritual dimensions of religious life […]."[56] Schuon's particular application of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas, Morris continues, has profoundly appealed

> to several generations of philosophers and theologians seeking to develop a comprehensive, non-reductive "philosophy of religions" enabling mutual understanding and active co-operation between the followers of different religious traditions and the increasing number of citizens who do not consciously identify exclusively with any particular historical tradition.[57]

And yet, Morris concludes, "Because of the peculiar vagaries of academic opinion and respectability, this wide-ranging influence is rarely mentioned publicly […], *but is to be found virtually everywhere*."[58]

While such a statement may seem oddly conspiratorial, public discretion regarding loyalty to a Schuonian interpretive framework is certainly true in the case of Chittick, who as mentioned in chapter 1, is recognized as one of the foremost Western experts on Ibn 'Arabi today.[59] While Chittick's meticulous and erudite translations have become a standard source

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[55] Ibid.

[56] James Winston Morris, "Ibn 'Arabi in the 'Far West,'" *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 24 (2001): 105-6.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Morris, "Ibn 'Arabi in the 'Far West,'" 106 (emphasis mine).

[59] E.g., Mark Sedgwick situates Chittick as the leading American authority on Ibn 'Arabi. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 157.

for the majority of academic and popular references to Ibn 'Arabi in English, and especially

for Perennialists themselves, Chittick's own opinion regarding Schuonian Perennialism has

remained inconspicuous. Indeed, Chittick's definitive work on Ibn 'Arabi and religious

pluralism, *Imaginal Worlds*, only contains a brief reference to Schuon as a Sufi authority

"who writes with intellectual rigor […]."[60] Yet, in a few select places Chittick has expressed

his views more openly. While references to Perennialists like Schuon and Nasr are found

scattered throughout Chittick's writings, the following two examples are exceptional.

First, in 2006, Chittick's essay "Sufism and Islam"[61] was published in an anthology

on Sufism described by Nasr in his foreword to the volume as "one of the most valuable

anthologies devoted to Sufism in a Western language […]."[62] While Chittick's article may

indeed have been written at an earlier stage in his career given the dated references, its

appearance in a volume whose preface asserts the following is telling: "These particular

essays […] are a sampler of the thought and approach of writers who would consider

themselves 'traditionalists' or 'perennialists'."[63] In the essay itself, Chittick argues that

Sufism is an "esoteric" path of *gnosis* that understands "exoteric" doctrine to be merely "a

symbolic prefiguration" of knowledge.[64] Indeed, such explicit Schuonian themes are

supported by references to overt Perennialist authors, which in and of themselves offer a

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[60] William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 4, 177n4.

[61] William C. Chittick, "Sufism and Islam," in *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*, ed. Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 21-32.

[62] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, foreword to *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*, ix.

[63] Roger Gaetani, preface to *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*, xiv.

[64] Chittick, "Sufism and Islam," 31.

significant slice into the "classical" Perennialist oeuvre including multiple works by Schuon and Nasr as well as references to Guénon, Titus Burckhardt, and Martin Lings.[65]

Second, in his 2007 anthology of essays, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul*, Chittick sets aside his eminent role as translator and lets his own voice come to the fore in a sustained argument for the contemporary revival of the Islamic "intellectual" (ʿaqlī) tradition in opposition to its "transmitted" (naqlī) counterpart. Chittick identifies this intellectual tradition with premodern Islamic philosophy and Sufism *qua* internal paths of "self-knowledge."[66] Chittick's proximity to Schuonian Perennialism is most evident in chapter 5, which is an exposition on the philosophy of Nasr whom he describes as "one of the few today who speak for this ['intellectual'] tradition."[67] Even in this chapter, however, Chittick maintains an outsider perspective, taking "Nasr and the traditionalists" to task for using "the esoteric/exoteric dichotomy as a key conceptual tool for understanding religion"—which, not without irony, Chittick takes recourse to in his "Sufism and Islam" article referenced above but here argues is unhelpful for "dealing with the actual texts."[68] This being said, Chittick's predilection for Nasr's Perennialist perspective is clear throughout. In defense of Nasr's own penchant for quoting Schuon, Chittick states:

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[65] Such authors are classified by Sedgwick as "hard" Traditionalists and are mainly published by overt Perennialist publishers for small specialized audiences. See Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 167.

[66] William C. Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), viii-ix.

[67] Ibid., xi.

[68] Ibid., 79, 81. Yet, in the final analysis, Chittick's criticism appears to be a rather constrained concession to an increasing academic consensus around such terms. On closer inspection, however, Chittick's repeated program of reviving an "intellectual" (ʿaqlī) tradition over a "transmitted" (naqlī) one presents the same opposition in more indigenous terms. Indeed, the presentation of Schuonian Perennialism as an "esoteric" path is based precisely on the distinction of "intellect" over traditional form; e.g., see Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon*, 94.

> The fact that he does not always cite Muslim authorities, but instead is likely to refer to Frithjof Schuon or Ananda Coomaraswamy, cannot be taken as evidence that his views do not have the Islamic support that he claims. He is not speaking as a preacher […], but rather as a philosopher *who has found some of the clearest expositions of his own intellectual vision in contemporary authors*.[69]

Chittick then makes the following observation about Nasr, which is critical for my analysis of Chittick's hermeneutical perspective in the present chapter:

> Nasr, of course, does not write only about Islam, but also about other religions as well. Like Schuon and Coomaraswamy, he claims *universal validity* for a point of view that he and they usually call "traditional" and that observers have often called "traditionalist" or "perennialist."[70]

As we will see, the idea of "universal validity"—which even here is identified by Chittick as specific to Schuonian Perennialism—often forms a subtext of Chittick's approach to Ibn 'Arabi and thus marks his interpretation as particularly Perennialist. Indeed, it is worth noting here that in an article arguing for Schuon's Islamic credentials, Nasr includes Chittick in a list of ten well-known American and European Islamicists, "all of whom," according to Nasr, "were deeply influenced by Schuon's works […]."[71]

Scholars who are openly devoted to Schuonian Perennialism, such as Reza Shah-Kazemi,[72] can quite effectively use Chittick's translations to present a specific universalist image of Ibn 'Arabi that leaves out a particular set of polemical themes present within his writings—themes that I argue are too important to disregard, especially for any discursive analysis that attempts to historicize Ibn 'Arabi's ideas. Those committed to the Perennialist

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[69] Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos*, 78 (emphasis mine).

[70] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[71] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Frithjof Schuon and the Islamic Tradition," in *The Essential Sophia*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Katherine O'Brien (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 268.

[72] Shah-Kazemi writes overtly from within the Perennialist school, and his two full length works that argue for an authentic Islamic mode of religious universalism, i.e., *Paths to Transcendence* and *The Other in the Light*, are dedicated to Frithjof Schuon and Martin Lings respectively.

framework, however, will no doubt respond that the Andalusian Sufi's metaphysics transcend history and thus rise above the more *mundanely secular* issues of politics, authority, and religious polemics. I maintain, however, that while Ibn 'Arabi's view of the religious Other may trouble our modern sensibilities, such a transhistorical approach essentializes his complex metaphysical ideas—which are fully imbricated with the situational discourse of their historical origin—and thus ultimately abuse them.

Ibn 'Arabi and the Transcendent Unity of Religions: A Perennialist Imperative

In his 1972 essay "Islam and the Encounter of Religions," Seyyed Hossein Nasr laid out what he felt was at stake in the contemporary study of religion. The "essential problem" with such a field of study, according to Nasr, "*is how to preserve religious truth, traditional orthodoxy, the dogmatic theological structures of one's own religion and yet gain knowledge of other traditions and accept them as spiritually valid ways and roads to God*."[73] Given Nasr's intellectual and spiritual standing in the Perennialist movement as, in the recent words of Chittick, "the foremost living member of the traditionalist school,"[74] such a prescriptive challenge for the study of religion should not be taken as empty rhetoric likely to go unheeded by those who follow his lead. In fact, the Perennialist scholar Shah-Kazemi has recently dubbed Nasr's 1972 essay as "one of the most important contemporary expressions […] of the principle of the 'transcendent unity of religions' from the point of view of the Islamic tradition as a whole."[75] Indeed, it was in his 1972 essay, as cited above, that Nasr

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[73] Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 127 (emphasis mine).

[74] William C. Chittick, introduction to *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007), ix.

[75] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light*, xvii.

compared Ibn 'Arabi's "religion of love" with Schuon's emblematic theme of "transcendent unity."

The doctrine of the transcendent unity of religions has been used by Perennialists to argue that within the Qur'an and the esoteric writings of the Sufis there is an acknowledgement of a deeper religious unity marking all revealed traditions as equally valid. This is so, they argue, in spite of the triumphant assertion of abrogative supersessionism that was held by most scholars of the medieval Islamic tradition, which, as was shown in chapter 1, included Ibn 'Arabi. Thus, Nasr, in the passage quoted above from his 1972 essay, asserts that "Sufism or Islamic gnosis is the most universal affirmation of that perennial wisdom which stands at the heart of Islam and in fact of all religion as such." He then, as we recall, invokes Ibn 'Arabi's "religion of love" as most representative of this perennial wisdom—as the true religion within all outward religious forms. Here, in order to universally validate "all religion as such," Nasr following Schuon must transcend historical religious difference by arguing for a transcendent *a priori* as "true religion," which in this case is represented by "perennial wisdom" (i.e., *sophia perennis*) and Ibn 'Arabi's essential "religion of love."

Nasr's Perennialist recourse to a transcendent religious *a priori* is indeed a prominent feature of universalist religious discourse. Yet, while Nasr's Perennialist position has been compared to other essentialist modes of religious pluralism, particularly the thought of John Hick, the discursive analytical value of such comparisons has been limited because of their tendency to devolve into theological debate. Part of the issue here, is that the Perennialist recourse to "tradition" and its insistence on the divinity of all religions as upholding "the irreducible character—the divinely willed uniqueness—of each of the revealed religions" creates an aura of authenticity against the comparatively "modern" pluralism of Hick, which

"seeks to eliminate these differences for the sake of a unity […]."[76] Such an ostensible divide between the "traditional" and the "modern" leads Adnan Aslan in his comparative analysis of the two scholars to note:

> It is certainly a problematical task to compare Hick, whose philosophy of religion bears the stamp of the idealism of Kant and the empiricism of Hume, *with Nasr, whom it is hard to situate within any mainstream philosophical orientation of the West, with the possible exception of Neoplatonism*. The two thinkers differ entirely in their conceptions of knowledge: Hick's concept is basically constituted from elements of post-Enlightenment philosophy, while Nasr's is constituted by the principles of Islamic faith and the perennial philosophy.[77]

Aslan tries to nuance his discussion later on when he states:

> [T]he perennial philosophy is a modern discourse, to a certain extent an ideological attempt to discover the significance of traditions. For instance, according to the perennialists, the great metaphysicians such as Ibn 'Arabi and Eckhart are the main expositors of the *sophia perennis*. I would argue that they are traditional, but not perennialists in Nasr's sense of the word; they did not write about their religions in order to convince modern people. Instead, they presented their traditions from the mystical perspective of which they were a part. In other words, they presented a traditional view of their religion, but not the perennial philosophy in a modern sense, as Nasr and other perennialists understand it. Hence we are obliged to conclude that the traditional point of view is not traditional in the sense that traditional people understood it.[78]

Yet, in the end such an analysis falls flat because it is circular. Aslan is correct to note that Perennialism is a modern discourse, but the fact that premodern people "did not write about their religions in order to convince modern people" is tautological and does not help us to understand the discursive structures that make Perennialism particularly modern.

Indeed, Schuonian Perennialism shares with Hickian pluralism a particular modern conception of religions that can be likened, as Hick himself does with his own theology, to a "Copernican revolution" that shifts the premodern conception of a singular dogmatic

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[76] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light*, 250.

[77] Adnan Aslan, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Richmond: Curzon, 1998), 77 (emphasis mine).

[78] Ibid., 129.

worldview to multiple religious worlds of equal validity.[79] Yet, while Hick's distinctive

Kantian model posits a central, unknowable "Real," Schuon's universalism argues that the

divine *makes itself known* through various religions and is thus knowable through a mode of

experiential intellection, i.e., "*gnosis*." Thus, in Hick's negative conception, the contrasting

truth claims of each circling religious worldview are ultimately human cognitive creations

and thus false in varying degrees.[80] Conversely, Schuon's positive perspective acknowledges

each conflicting religious claim as variously true.

Instead of comparing Schuonian Perennialism with Hickian universalism, as Aslan

does above, a comparison with Schleiermacher's religious pluralism proves to be more

fruitful analytically and situates Schuonian Perennialism within a larger genealogy of

religious pluralism. Because Schleiermacher was keen to reject the Kantian reduction of

religion to mere reason and morality, he was unwilling to discredit the historical religions as

invalid.[81] Thus, Schleiermacher posits that each religion was "one of the special forms which

mankind, in some region of the earth and at some stage of development, has to accept."[82] As

such, Schleiermacher asserts that

> *the positive religions are just the definite forms in which religion must exhibit itself*—a thing
> to which your so-called natural religions have no claim. They are only a vague, sorry, poor

[79] See John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1993), 130-31. See also Philip Almond, "John Hick's Copernican Theology," *Theology* 86: 709 (1983) 36-41.

[80] Gavin D'Costa has noted how Hick's recourse to the Kantian typologies of *noumenal* Real and *phenomenal* religious responses forces the distinctive truth claims of each religion "into agnosticism." See Gavin D'Costa, "John Hick and Religious Pluralism: Yet Another Revolution," in *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion: Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick*, ed. Harold Hewitt, Jr. (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1991), 7. See also John Hick, *God has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 105.

[81] Zimmermann, *Humanism and Religion*, 136.

[82] Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 216.

thought that corresponds to no reality, and you will find that *in the positive religions alone a true individual cultivation of the religious capacity is possible*.[83]

Thus, Nasr's above assertion that Ibn 'Arabi's "religion of love" is found at the heart of all religions tellingly echoes Schleiermacher's recourse here to an *a priori* "religion" found within "the positive religions." As William Johnson notes, for Schleiermacher, "[e]very particular, positive Religion was ultimately founded upon the Religion of the infinite," i.e., "*the religious a priori*."[84]

By momentarily setting aside the theological differences between Perennialism and the universalist discourse of Schleiermacher here,[85] I wish to look more closely at Schleiermacher's particular strategic use of a transcendent religious *a priori* in order to highlight a similar strategy within Schuonian Perennialist discourse on religious validity.[86] The discursive strategy of establishing "true religion" as a transcendent *a priori* allowed Schleiermacher to circumvent the problem of religious difference and simultaneously argue for its necessity. Thus, for Schleiermacher, "[r]eligion could never be realized except in a concrete historical form. Historical Religions always possessed, therefore, the quality of imperfection."[87]

The discursive structure of the Schuonian Perennialist argument for orthodoxy as both divine and conflictive follows a similar logic, as Nasr notes:

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[83] Ibid., 217 (emphasis mine).

[84] William A. Johnson, *On Religion: A Study of Theological Method in Schleiermacher and Nygren* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964), 37 (emphasis mine).

[85] Regarding their most pronounced differences, see p. 97n24 above.

[86] In other words, as far as possible I wish to take a Foucauldian approach that attempts to remain "at the level of discourse itself" by analyzing such discourse *functionally* as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak." Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2005), 53-54.

[87] Johnson, *On Religion*, 36.

For Schuon orthodoxy is related at once to Truth and the formal homogeneity of a particular traditional universe. To speak of the Truth is also to speak of the possibility of error. To be orthodox is to be on the side of the Truth. But since the Truth has revealed itself not once and in only one formal language but many times in different 'worlds' possessing their own formal homogeneity and language of discourse, the question of being on the side of the truth involves also the formal world in question. Schuon therefore defends Christianity as orthodox in itself while being heterodox from the point of view of Jewish orthodoxy and he explains why Buddhism is an orthodox relgion [*sic*], that is an embodiment of the Truth and means "provided" by that Truth to attain the Truth, while it is considered as heterodox from the perspective of Brahmanism.[88]

Here in full view, Nasr rushes headlong into an argument that forcefully counters what is commonly referred to as the Aristotelian law of non-contradiction, a principle that is the tacit assumption of normative theology.[89] Indeed, precisely because "orthodox" doctrines make truth claims about reality, they have historically struggled to avoid such contradictions. Yet, a theological or metaphysical perspective that claims to acknowledge all truth claims as valid cannot operate from such normative principles. In addressing this conflict, Schuon notes:

> One could conceive, it is true, that *there might be only one Revelation* or Tradition for our human world and that diversity might be realized through other worlds, unknown to man or even unknowable by him; but this would imply a failure to understand that *what determines the difference among forms of Truth is the difference among human receptacles*. For thousands of years humanity has been divided into several fundamentally different branches constituting as many complete humanities, more or less closed in on themselves; *the existence of spiritual receptacles so different and so original demands a differentiated refraction of the one Truth*.[90]

In a similarly structured notion, Schleiermacher states:

> The whole of religion is nothing but the sum of all relations of man to God, apprehended in all the possible ways in which any man can be immediately conscious in his life. *In this sense there is but one religion*, for it would be but a poverty-stricken and halting life, if all these relations did not exist wherever religion ought to be. Yet all men will not by any means apprehend them in the same way, but quite differently. Now this difference alone is felt and alone can be exhibited while the reduction of all differences is only thought.

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[88] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, introduction to *The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon*, by Frithjof Schuon, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Amity: Amity House, 1986), 9.

[89] A. N. Williams, *The Architecture of Theology: Structure, System, and Ratio* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 24.

[90] Frithjof Schuon, *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, ed. James S. Cutsinger, trans. Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge, and James Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 17 (emphasis mine).

> You are wrong, therefore, with your universal religion that is natural to all, *for no one will have his own true and right religion, if it is the same for all.*[91]

In both of these arguments, the authors call upon a mode of discourse that seeks to transcend the principle of non-contradiction by arguing that for religion to be valid, different individuals or groups must experience religious truth differently. In Schuon, the differences within human ontological capacity "demand" different refractions of one divine truth, while in Schleiermacher one ontological truth is experienced differently depending on the human receptacle. While such subtle differences highlight the distinctive ontological assumptions of each author, the structure of the argument is identical.

In his study on postliberal theology, George Lindbeck has called this type of doctrinal model "experiential-expressivism." Following Bernard Lonergan, Lindbeck has identified several key aspects of such a model, all of which revolve around the notion that different religions are diverse objectifications or expressions of "a common core experience." Such a core experience is described by Lonergan as "'God's gift of love' or when fully present, as 'the dynamic state of being in love without restrictions' and 'without an object.'"[92] Recalling again Nasr's 1972 essay and his passage on Islamic *gnosis* and Ibn 'Arabi (quoted in its entirety above), the connection of love with such a "common core experience" is implicit:

> Islamic gnosis is the most universal affirmation of that perennial wisdom which stands at the heart of Islam and in fact of all religion as such. It is this supreme doctrine of Unity […] that the Sufis call the 'religion of love' and to which Ibn 'Arabî refers in his well-known verses in the *Tarjumân al-ashwâq*. This love is not merely sentiment or emotions, it is the realized aspect of gnosis. It is a transcendent knowledge that reveals the inner unity of religions.[93]

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[91] Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 217 (emphasis mine).

[92] Bernard A. Lonergan cited in George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 31.

[93] Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 146-47 (underline mine).

Here, "love" is claimed to be "the realized aspect of gnosis" *qua* "transcendent knowledge."

Similarly, the Perennialist author Patrick Laude writes that Schuon's "perspective on Islam

derived from gnosis, that is, a spiritual and supra-rational 'heart-knowledge' that finds its

most direct expression in the primordial and universal wisdom referred to as *sophia*

perennis."[94] Thus, the concept of "*gnosis*" as combining the experiential state of love with

that of a "supra-rational" knowledge, is a type of experiential intuition, or what Laude and

Jean-Baptiste Aymard have elsewhere called "supraformal intuition."[95] In Schleiermacher's

version of the experiential-expressivist model, he uses similar terms that express the common

experience of religion, the closest one to the Perennialist "*gnosis*" is the Schleiermacherian

"intuition" (*Anschauung*),[96] which as John Oman in his preface to the original English

translation of *On Religion* notes, is perhaps more exactly translated as "immediate

knowledge."[97]

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[94] Patrick Laude, *Pathways to an Inner Islam: Massignon, Corbin, Guénon, and Schuon* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 14.

[95] Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon*, 91.

[96] As Robert M. Adams notes, intuition (*Anschauung*) as "a sort of mental seeing, distinct from any systematic theory" is the dominant mode of religious consciousness in the first edition of *On Religion*, with "feeling" as secondary. In the second edition, however, feeling becomes dominant over intuition. See Robert Merrihew Adams, "Faith and religious knowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 36. As Theodore Vial notes, however, intuition and feeling are two sides of the same coin for Schleiermacher: while intuition is the objective side of experience, i.e., the action of the world upon us, feeling is the subjective side, i.e., the change within us that occurs as a result of such action. See Theodore Vial, "Anschauung and Intuition, Again (Or, "We Remain Bound to the Earth"), in *Schleiermacher, the Study of Religion, and the Future of Theology: A Transatlantic Dialogue*, ed. Brent W. Sockness and Wilhelm Gräb (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2010), 46. For example, in the first edition, Schleiermacher states: "On intuition of the Universe my whole Speech hinges. It is the highest formula of religion, determining its nature and fixing its boundaries. 'All intuition proceeds from the influence of the thing perceived on the person perceiving. The former acts originally and independently, and the latter receives, combines and apprehends in accordance with its nature.'" Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 278.

[97] John Oman preface to *On Religion*, vii. It should also be noted that John Laughland connects the use of the term *Anschauung* in the philosophy of Schelling, who was an important influence upon Schleiermacher, with the concept of *gnosis* in his conception of "intellectual contemplation" (*intellektuelle Anschauung*): "Intellectual contemplation was the self-knowledge of the absolute I: I know myself to be an I by intellectual contemplation, and that contemplation affords access to the Absolute itself, the absolute I." John Laughland, *Schelling versus Hegel: From German Idealism to Christian Metaphysics* (Aldershot: Ashgate Pub., 2007), 44.

What is important in all of this is the fact that for both Schleiermacherian and Schuonian essentialist models of religion, the idea of religious experience *qua* intuitive knowledge is strategically deployed in order to transcend the differences of competing religious epistemologies. Yet, in order for such an experiential modality to satisfactorily engage with competing truth claims, a concomitant conception of religious "symbols" must also be posited. Thus, in experiential-expressivist models

> [t]he purpose of doctrine is not to mirror the real but to give logical coherence to *a system of symbols*. If this is the case, then it is possible that two differing religious systems of symbolic representation and the second order doctrines that systematize them can both be valid expressions of the experience of [the divine].[98]

Similarly, recourse to symbolism is an inherent strategy of Schuonian Perennialism. As Schuon himself notes:

> If Revelations more or less exclude one another, this is so of necessity since God, when He speaks, expresses Himself in an absolute mode; but this absoluteness concerns the universal content rather than the form, to which it applies only in a relative and symbolical sense, *for the form is a symbol* of the content and so too of humanity as a whole, to which precisely this content is addressed. [...] Revelation speaks an absolute language because God is absolute, not because the form is absolute; in other words the absoluteness of the Revelation is absolute in itself, but relative in its form.[99]

Schuon can thus assert that "with God, truth lies above all in the symbol's effective power of enlightenment and not in its literalness," and "the existence of dogmatic antinomies serves to show that for God truth is above all in the efficacy of the symbol and not in the 'bare fact'."[100]

Yet, in terms of Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on religious authority, such claims of the symbolic as regnant over other discursive practices are difficult to sustain. Indeed, the notion

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[98] Jacqueline Mariña, *Transformation of the Self in the Thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 230 (emphasis mine).

[99] Schuon, *Gnosis*, 18 (emphasis mine).

[100] Ibid., 10, 12.

that systems of symbols are the decisive factor that determine so-called religious dispositions and experience has been forcefully challenged by Talal Asad. In *Genealogies of Religion*, Asad argues that before the modern universalization of religion, religious "truth" was formed through established sets "of practical rules attached to specific processes of power and knowledge […]."[101] In an insightful discussion on the relationship between power and truth in early Christianity, and here he discusses St. Augustine particularly, Asad notes that "coercion was a condition for the realization of truth, and discipline essential to its maintenance."[102] Asad further notes that for Augustine

> it was not mere symbols that implant true Christian dispositions, but power—ranging all the way from laws (imperial and ecclesiastical) and other sanctions (hellfire, death, salvation, good repute, peace) to the disciplinary activities of social institutions (family, school, city, church) and of human bodies (fasting, prayer, obedience, penance). Augustine was quite clear that power, the effect of an entire network of motivated practices, assumes a religious form because of the end to which it is directed, for human events are the instruments of God. *It was not the mind that moved spontaneously to religious truth, but power that created the conditions for experiencing that truth*.[103]

In what follows, I similarly interrogate the notion that for Ibn 'Arabi religious truth was arrived at through a gnostic response to a set of symbols devoid of frameworks of power. This is not to deny the importance of transcendent experience in Ibn 'Arabi's thought, and Sufism more broadly.[104] Rather, I argue that Ibn 'Arabi's experience was fully integrated within his own historical and intellectual context. In other words, while Ibn 'Arabi's visionary "monism" is famous for its inversions, such inversions happened within the

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[101] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 42.

[102] Ibid., 34.

[103] Ibid., 35 (emphasis mine).

[104] For a discussion regarding the primary role of mystical experience over language and concepts in Sufism see Carl W. Ernst, "Mystical Language and the Teaching Context in the Early Lexicons of Sufism," in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 181-201.

confluence of established discursive practices and socio-political history. The claims that result from such a worldview often seem to contradict themselves within a peculiar wedding of transcendent metaphysics and literalistic legalism. In Western scholarship on Ibn 'Arabi, as noted in chapter 1, the former is often given primacy while the latter explained away as accidental. Yet, I argue here that in order for the economy of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas to remain solvent, both sides of this epistemological coin must be tendered. As Asad trenchantly notes, a "consequence of assuming a symbolic system separate from practices is that *important distinctions are sometimes obscured, or even explicitly denied.*"[105]

Schuonian Heliocentrism and Ibn 'Arabi's Doctrine of Abrogation

In chapter 1, we were introduced to the following passage of Ibn 'Arabi from the *Futūḥāt* (Fut. III, 153), here translated by Chittick in *Imaginal Worlds*:

> All the revealed religions [*sharā'i'*] are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden, and their lights are included in the light of the sun. Their being hidden is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions that takes place through Muhammad's revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the light of the stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all messengers and all the revealed religions. They are not rendered null [*bāṭil*] by abrogation—that is the opinion of the ignorant.[106]

In more specialized discussions, this passage has become the sole proof-text for those who claim that Ibn 'Arabi recognized all religions as valid, even in the face of the classical assertion of abrogation (*naskh*).[107] As a preface to his translation, also quoted in chapter 1, Chittick issues the following caveat:

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[105] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 35 (emphasis mine).

[106] Ibn 'Arabi cited in Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 125. (Fut. III, 153).

[107] This translation has been quoted extensively by Shah-Kazemi in all of his books and most of his book chapters and articles; e.g., see Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light*, 241; *Paths to Transcendence*, 121; *The Spirit of Tolerance in Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 88; "Beyond Polemics and Pluralism: The Universal Message of the Qur'an," in *Between Heaven and Hell: Islam, Salvation, and the Fate of Others*, ed. Mohammad

The Koran never criticizes the prophetic messages as such, but it often condemns misunderstandings or distortions by those who follow the prophets. The Shaykh sometimes criticizes specific distortions or misunderstandings in the Koranic vein, *but he does not draw the conclusion that many Muslims have drawn—that the coming of Islam abrogated* (naskh) *previous revealed religions*. Rather, he says, Islam is like the sun and other religions like the stars. Just as the stars remain when the sun rises, *so also the other religions remain valid when Islam appears*.[108]

Chittick follows this statement with a final remark not mentioned in chapter 1, but critical for the present discussion. At the end of the above passage he states: "One can add a point that perhaps Ibn al-ʿArabī would also accept: *What appears as a sun from one point of view may be seen as a star from another point of view*."[109] Chittick's claim is significant, since it anachronistically suggests that Ibn ʿArabi would have accepted a heliocentric cosmography displacing his clear "Ptolemaic" framework. Indeed, as detailed in chapter 1, Ibn ʿArabi's "geocentric" cosmography consists of an Islamo-centric world around which a "triumphant" Muhammadan sun revolves.[110] As such, Chittick's assertion subtly implies that Ibn ʿArabi would have agreed to a paradigm shift challenging the entire basis of his supersessionist metaphysical cosmography—i.e., a shift to a non-hierarchical universe of multiple prophetic

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Hassan Khalil (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 95; "The Metaphysics of Interfaith Dialogue: Sufi Perspectives on the Universality of the Quranic Message," in *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002), 182; "Beyond Polemics and Pluralism: The Universal Message of the Qur'an," (paper presented at the conference: "Al-Azhar and the West: Bridges of Dialogue," Cairo, 5 January, 2009), 8. Chittick's translation and commentary on Fut. III, 153 from *Imaginal Worlds* (p. 125) was also published verbatim without proper citation by Muhammad Suhail Umar, preface to *The Religious Other: Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, ed. Muhammad Suhail Umar (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 2008), ii. References to the original passage in support of the above argument are also made by Éric Geoffroy, "Pluralism or the Consciousness of Alterity in Islam," in *Universal Dimensions of Islam: Studies in Comparative Religion*, ed. Patrick Laude (Bloomington: World Wisdom, Inc., 2011), 102; and Abd ar-Razzâq Yahya (Charles-André Gilis), *L'Esprit universel de L'Islam* (Algiers: La Maison des Livres, 1989), 119.

[108] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 125 (emphasis mine).

[109] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[110] As chapter 1 discusses in detail, Chittick leaves out critical passages in the *Futūḥāt* that definitively show Ibn ʿArabi's clear supersessionist stance regarding abrogation and the sun metaphor presented in Fut. III, 153. See chapter 1, pp. 74-82.

suns revolving around other "equally valid" religio-centric planets. While chapter 1 made

clear that this was decidedly not the way Ibn 'Arabi used the metaphor of the sun (invoking

the poem of Nābigha), such a strikingly "non-traditional" interpretation of this ancient

metaphor has been made by Perennialists before.[111]

In his 1986 introduction to *The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon*, Seyyed

Hossein Nasr stated something remarkably similar about Schuon's own work. Here he notes

that Schuon "has written over and over again on […] *how the sun of each religious cosmos is*

for that cosmos the sun while being a star in that spiritual firmament which symbolizes the

Divine Infinity."[112] An example of one such passage that Nasr alludes to here was put forth

by Schuon in his 1957 publication of *Sentiers de Gnose* (*Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*). Following

an extended discussion of how revelations can exclude one another and still be

simultaneously valid, Schuon encapsulates this "doctrine" within a solar metaphor:

> This whole doctrine is clearly illustrated by the following example: *the sun is unique in our*
> *solar system, but it is not so in space; we can see other suns since they are located in space*
> *as is ours, but we do not see them as suns*. The unicity of our sun is belied by the multiplicity
> of the fixed stars *without thereby ceasing to be valid within the system that is ours under*
> *Providence*; hence the unicity is manifested in the part, not in the totality, which the part
> nonetheless represents for us; by the divine Will it "is" thus the totality, though only for us
> and only insofar as our mind, whose scope is likewise willed by God, does not go beyond
> forms; but even in this case the part "is" totality *as far as its spiritual efficacy is concerned*.[113]

The striking similarity between Schuon's above passage, Nasr's apparent gloss, and

Chittick's additional commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's "proof-text" on the validity of revealed

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[111] Indeed, the concept that our sun was merely a star in an infinite universe can be traced back to the Italian Dominican friar Giordano Bruno (d. 1600), whose eclectic universalism expanded upon Copernicus's heliocentric model and argued for an interconnected and interdependent reality: "There are countless suns and an infinity of planets which circle round their suns as our seven planets circle round ours." Giordano Bruno cited in Michael White, *The Pope and the Heretic: The True Story of Giordano Bruno, the Man Who Dared to Defy the Roman Inquisition* (New York: William Morrow, 2002), 71.

[112] Nasr, introduction to *The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon*, 5 (emphasis mine).

[113] Schuon, *Gnosis*, 19-20 (emphasis mine).

religions should indeed give us pause. Whether Chittick's statement that "[w]*hat appears as a sun from one point of view may be seen as a star from another point of view*" is a direct allusion to the similar assertions made by Schuon or Nasr, or merely an echo, is of little consequence; the symmetry between them and their Copernican commentary upon an ancient metaphor clearly shows that Chittick is thinking about Ibn 'Arabi's passage within the same Schuonian discursive field that presupposes the "transcendent unity of religions."

Indeed, it is from within this discursive field that Chittick observes: "One would expect to find among the Sufis a clear exposition of the *universality of revealed truth* without the reservations expressed by most other Muslims. But the Sufis had to take into account the beliefs of their contemporaries."[114] Besides taking recourse to a Schuonian position of universal validity, here Chittick (as also noted in chapter 1) surprisingly employs a reductive approach that relegates Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on the People of the Book as pandering to the scholarly authority of his day. Thus, according to Chittick, Ibn 'Arabi "often defends a literal reading of the Koranic criticisms of the People of the Book," but he does not do so universally like "most other Muslims"; i.e., he only criticizes the particular local groups that the Qur'an addressed during the time of Muhammad.[115]

Chittick's above commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's "proof-text" on the validity of revealed religions (i.e., Fut. III, 153) has provided Shah-Kazemi with the authoritative basis necessary to develop this rather technical argument further in openly Perennialist discourse and as a result appears in the majority of his publications.[116] Drawing on Chittick's above assertion

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[114] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 125 (emphasis mine).

[115] Ibid.

that Ibn 'Arabi rejected the idea that the coming of Islam abrogated the validity of other

religions, Shah-Kazemi asserts:

> In many places Ibn Arabi exalts the Quranic revelation above all others, but he does so in a nuanced manner, <u>making it clear that the historical appearance of Islam</u> (or: the final revelation of the one religion, "Islam," in the sense of universal submission) <u>did not nullify the efficacy of the earlier religions</u> (or: the earlier revelations of this one religion); <u>the commonly held view in Islamic exoterism, that Islam "abrogated"—in the sense of annulled or invalidated—all other religions is thus rejected;</u> for him, Islam's "abrogation" (*naskh*) of other religions means that Islam takes precedence over them, it "supersedes" them, in the literal sense of "sitting above" them. And, in a brilliant dialectical stroke, <u>he transforms the whole doctrine of abrogation from being a basis for the rejection of other religions into a decisive argument for the validity of the other religions</u> […]."[117]

Here, Shah-Kazemi dissociates Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of abrogation from "the commonly held

view in Islamic exoterism," which has invalidated the previous religions through the standard

concept of abrogation. Rather, according to Shah-Kazemi, Ibn 'Arabi's idea of abrogation

simply means that "Islam" (historical or universal) benevolently sits above them and

confirms their validity.

After quoting Chittick's translation of Fut. III, 153 from *Imaginal Worlds*, Shah-

Kazemi draws the following conclusion:

> In other words, following the dictates of Islam and believing it to be the most complete religion can coexist with an awareness *that the other religions retain their enlightening function and their spiritual efficacy for their adherents*. The very real differences of conception, orientation, and ritual as exist between the religions are not ignored in this perspective; rather, *one is urged to submit entirely to the form of one's own religion even while recognizing its inevitable particularity and hence relativity*; thus for Ibn Arabi *there is no substantial contradiction between following the dictates of one's own "way"—in terms of which certain things may be forbidden—and accepting the intrinsic validity of another "way" which permits those same things*.[118]

Shah-Kazemi's summation here (and variously repeated in the majority of his other works) is

useful for its concise grafting of Schuon's above heliocentric model of the validity of all

religions onto Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of abrogation. Here, Shah-Kazemi claims that Ibn 'Arabi

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[117] Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence*, 121 (underline mine).

[118] Ibid., 121-22 (emphasis mine).

subscribed to an essentialist discourse on religion that transcended the principle of non-contradiction by accepting the "intrinsic validity" of opposing religious rules and doctrines. Here, religious experience *qua* intuitive knowledge is implicit in their common "enlightening function" and "spiritual efficacy." Indeed, Schuon's cosmographic model of the transcendental unity of religions, as quoted above, links the different religious solar systems together by means of their "spiritual efficacy":

> The unicity of our sun is belied by the multiplicity of the fixed stars *without thereby ceasing to be valid within the system that is ours under Providence*; hence the unicity is manifested in the part, not in the totality […]; but even in this case the part "is" totality *as far as its spiritual efficacy is concerned*.[119]

As was also discussed above, Schuon links "efficacy" with the enlightening power of the religious "symbol": "the existence of dogmatic antinomies serves to show that for God truth is above all in the efficacy of the symbol and not in the 'bare fact'."[120] Indeed, Shah-Kazemi similarly argues that Ibn 'Arabi enacted legal prescriptions "as symbols relating to the principial [*sic*] realities they embody and intend."[121] Such a proposition allows Shah-Kazemi above to decouple legal prescriptions with their actual rulings and thus posit an *a priori* set of "principal realities" (i.e., essences) that transcend particular forms and thus the law of non-contradiction: "thus for Ibn Arabi *there is no substantial contradiction between following the dictates of one's own 'way'—in terms of which certain things may be forbidden—and accepting the intrinsic validity of another 'way' which permits those same things*."

To recapitulate the main points presented by the Schuonian Perennialist cosmographical treatment of Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of abrogation and as formulated in the

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[119] Schuon, *Gnosis*, 19-20 (emphasis mine).

[120] Ibid., 12.

[121] Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence*, 200.

detailed arguments of Chittick and Shah-Kazemi above, the following three interrelated points are clearly presented as Ibn 'Arabi's position: (i) even though Islam is the most complete religion (for those who follow it), all other contemporary religions maintain their "enlightening function" and "spiritual efficacy," (ii) the particular conceptual and material differences of each religion are real, but ultimately relative, and (iii) the existence of conflicting prescriptions among the religions do not present a "substantial contradiction" between them; thus all religions are equally and intrinsically "valid."

Before interrogating these claims further, however, it is necessary to pause here and unpack such assertions within a broader scholarly discussion of inter-religious validity outside of the Perennialist purview, as far as is possible.[122] Since the language used to address such issues is ambiguous and potentially confusing, the following excursus attempts to distill the operative ideas around Perennialist claims of the transcendent unity of religions in the context of Ibn 'Arabi's cosmology of salvation and the attendant term "universalism." In doing so, I will clarify exactly what is at stake and refine the questions with which I approach Ibn 'Arabi's discourse in the remainder of this chapter.

Excursus: Epistemological and Soteriological Universalism

In reading contemporary treatments of Ibn 'Arabi and his ideas on other religions, the terminology of religious validity, universalism, and pluralism is often used interchangeably and with various meanings that often conflict. For example, Shah-Kazemi defines religious "pluralism" through a Hickian framework as the belief that although "all religions are equal, none has the right to claim to be unique, for all are human, 'cognitive responses' to the

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[122] I make this qualification since even the thorough treatment of Ibn 'Arabi's soteriology by Mohammad Hassan Khalil discussed below relies heavily on Chittick's interpretations.

ineffable Real—in the words of its chief proponent, John Hick."[123] As such, Shah-Kazemi

argues that Ibn 'Arabi is representative of a "universalist" position, which

> shares with pluralism the basic premise that the major religious traditions are valid paths to
> salvation, but parts company with the pluralist in asserting that this salvific efficacy stems
> from the fact that these religions are divinely revealed, not humanly constructed.[124]

Conversely, in his recent monograph on Traditionalism, Mark Sedgwick notes that "[t]he

distinction between Perennialism and 'universalism' […] is that the former finds unity in the

primordial Perennial Philosophy, while the later lumps religions together indistinctly."[125]

Thus, Shah-Kazemi and Sedgwick use the term "universalist" in starkly opposite ways: as a

stand-in for the Perennialist position and as against Perennialism respectively.

In his recent work *Islam and the Fate of Others*, Mohammad Khalil uses the term

"universalism" to categorize Ibn 'Arabi in a still different context. Here, universalism is the

binary opposite of "damnationism." These terms are used to specifically categorize

discourses on the duration of Hell: universalists hold that all people will be granted eternal

Paradise, while damnationists maintain that some will have to endure the Fire eternally. To

complicate things even more, the category of universalism, for Khalil, includes the subgroups

quasi- and ultimate universalism.[126] Paradoxically, Khalil is forced to classify Ibn 'Arabi as a

"quasi-universalist" since, as mentioned in chapter 1, according to Ibn 'Arabi's rather unique

mixture of literalism and a hermeneutics of mercy, there will be people who will remain in

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[123] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light*, xxiv.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 129.

[126] Mohammad Hassan Khalil, *Islam and the Fate of Others: The Salvation Question* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 13, 20.

Hell forever even though their punishment will cease and it will become pleasing for them.[127]

Besides Khalil's universalism/damnationism category, he further divides Muslim theological

discourses into the now standard threefold typology of inclusivism, exclusivism, and

pluralism.[128] However, in Khalil's treatment he includes the additional subgroups of limited

and liberal inclusivism.[129] Indeed, Khalil's proliferation of categories and final classification

of Ibn 'Arabi as a "liberal inclusivist" over that of a "pluralist" (in addition to a quasi-

universalist) quickly reaches a point of diminishing returns where such categories seem too

similar to be analytically useful.[130]

Yet, what is more important for our concerns here, is that Khalil jettisons the usual

inclusion of truth claims within the standard threefold model above and situates his

classifications from a strictly soteriological basis.[131] As such, Khalil asserts that Ibn 'Arabi

> affirms the salvation of "sincere" non-Muslims, because of his belief that every single path
> we take is not only created by but leads to God—a God of mercy (*raḥma*) and nobility

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[127] See Ibid., 66-69. See also chapter 1, p. 63.

[128] This threefold model is the usual typology used within studies on religious pluralism. Originally formulated by Alan Race, it was further developed by Gavin D'Costa. See Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1983); and Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). See also Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 14n3.

[129] Khalil, *Islam*, 7, 11, 12.

[130] According to Khalil, inclusivists "affirm that theirs is the path of Heaven but hold that sincere outsiders who could not have recognized it as such will be saved," while pluralists "assert that, regardless of the circumstances, there are several religious traditions or interpretations that are equally effective salvifically."[130] In this schema inclusivists limit the ability of the religious Other to be saved more than pluralists do, since the latter categorically recognize other religions as equally salvific. Yet, according to Khalil, liberal inclusivists "assert that the category of sincere non-Muslims includes individuals who have been exposed to the message in its true form yet are in no way convinced. […] For liberal inclusivists, if the message were never seen to be a possible source of divine guidance, it would make little sense to speak of a sincere response." See Khalil, *Islam*, 7, 11, 12, 55. See also p. 130n138 below.

[131] As Khalil states: "whereas various versions of this classification system concern truth claims, mine is strictly soteriological; whereas most define, for example, 'pluralists' as those who hold multiple religions to be equally salvific and equally true ontologically, I define 'pluralists' *simply as those who hold multiple religions to be equally salvific*." Khalil, *Islam*, 152n23 (emphasis mine).

(*karam*)—he maintains that *all* of humanity, including even the most wicked, will ultimately arrive at bliss.[132]

Indeed, as mentioned in chapter 1, because Ibn 'Arabi's ultimate soteriology is informed by a radical hermeneutic of mercy, Ibn 'Arabi posits that even those in eternal damnation will eventually find contentment and bliss. Yet, because Khalil does not address scriptural truth claims and their epistemological validity, the implications regarding a severe punishment for those in Hell during the interim period remain unfleshed.

As I noted towards the beginning of chapter 1, it is a popular contention, often offered in Perennialist discourse, that Ibn 'Arabi simply accepted all belief positions as "true," and thus leading to God. Yet as was shown in chapter 1, such assertions are highly reductive and prone to being anachronistically understood within secular-liberal frameworks of modern subjectivity.[133] Indeed, as was also evinced in chapter 1, Ibn 'Arabi clearly has issues with what he considers "deviant" religious positions, particularly those that display modes of what he considered to be "disbelief (*al-kufr*) and blasphemy (*al-sabb*) spoken by the Jews and Christians with respect to God."[134] Even Khalil himself admits that for Ibn 'Arabi, "[a]lthough all will eventually attain felicity as they proceed toward God, the righteous will be spared the 'deserts, perils, vicious predators, and harmful serpents' found along the way."[135] Here Khalil quotes a larger discussion and translation from *Imaginal Worlds* where Chittick recounts Ibn 'Arabi's concept that all paths lead back to God. Chittick relates that for Ibn 'Arabi, perfect saints understand with the "eye of the heart" that all things, good and

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[132] Ibid., 55.

[133] See chapter 1, pp. 42-45, 48.

[134] Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2004), 235 (Fut. I, 191). See chapter 1, p. 66.

[135] Khalil, *Islam*, 67.

evil, exist through God's will and His creative command (*al-amr al-takwīnī*). However,

Chittick immediately qualifies this statement by noting Ibn 'Arabi's formulaic, dyadic

corollary asserting the necessity of God's prescriptive, or obligative, command (*al-amr al-*

taklīfī), which is the origin of revealed law. Here, Chittick notes

> In no way does their acceptance of all beliefs negate their acknowledgement that everyone is
> called to follow the prescriptive command, which sets down the immediate path to felicity.
> This is why Ibn al-'Arabī writes, "It is incumbent upon you to practice the worship of God
> brought by the Shariah and tradition [*al-samʿ*]" (III 311.23). He explains that the person who
> sees things as they truly are "travels on the path of felicity that is not preceded by any
> wretchedness, for this path is easy, bright, exemplary, pure, unstained, and without any
> crookedness or deviation. As for the other path, its final outcome is felicity, but along the way
> are found deserts, perils, vicious predators, and harmful serpents. *Hence no created thing*
> *reaches the end of this second path without suffering those terrors*" (III 418.12).[136]

Thus as Khalil notes, because Ibn 'Arabi holds "wrath" as an eternal divine attribute, its

consequence of "chastisement" is also considered by him to be an eternal attribute.[137]

Moreover as mentioned in chapter 1, Khalil also crucially points out Ibn 'Arabi's therapeutic

conception of "chastisement" as a rectification of divine mercy, thus allowing the torments of

Hell to turn blissfully sweet.[138] It is therefore important to note that while Ibn 'Arabi held that

"every single path we take is not only created by but leads to God," as Khalil does above, he

also held that the interim between any path and its destination of felicity is either filled with

divine reward or chastisement. And as Chittick himself stresses in the passage above, the

criteria that Ibn 'Arabi used for distinguishing between them was based on revealed law, i.e.,

the sharia.

In such a context, the problem raised by a prescriptive sharia and the Qur'anic call for

"obedience" as also discussed in chapter 1 addresses more immediate questions posed by

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[136] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 155 (emphasis mine).

[137] Khalil, *Islam*, 67.

[138] See chapter 1, p. 63. See also Khalil, *Islam*, 66. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Abul Ela Affifi
(Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-ʿArabi, 1966), 94.

religious truth claims than those of final redemption *qua* felicity (*saʿāda*)—at least in terms

of Ibn ʿArabi's cosmology of universal salvation, broadly defined.[139] Since Schuonian

Perennialists argue for the symbolic "truth" of conflicting religions, discussions like Khalil's

that focus strictly on soteriology appear to explore counter, albeit related, questions. Indeed,

in a separate article on Islamic pluralism Khalil writes, "One of the core beliefs of

perennialism is that each of the major religious traditions is, in a sense, true and can lead its

adherents to God (or 'the Real')."[140] Similarly, Shah-Kazemi states that the notion that the

different religions "*are 'true' insofar as they can lead one to the 'real'*" is characteristic of

Ibn ʿArabi's perspective.[141] Another overt spokesperson for Schuonian Perennialism, the

renown scholar of religion Huston Smith explains the universal validity of religions by noting

that "the differences in revelations 'flesh out' God's nature by seeing it from different angles.

They supplement our view without compromising the fact that each angle is, in its own right,

adequate, containing (in traditional locution) '*truth sufficient unto salvation*.'"[142]

Thus, when Schuon invokes his heliocentric model of the transcendental unity of

religions above, the idea of "spiritual efficacy" is used analogously for "validity" and "truth":

> The unicity of our sun is belied by the multiplicity of the fixed stars *without thereby ceasing to be valid within the system that is ours under Providence*; hence the unicity is manifested in

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[139] "Broadly defined" here, since technically Ibn ʿArabi still makes a distinction between the people of Hell and those of Paradise, which is why Khalil refuses to consider Ibn ʿArabi a full blown "universalist." However, even Khalil admits that within Ibn ʿArabi's cosmology of salvation, those destined for the Fire would be miserable in Paradise since its equilibrium would not accommodate their extreme hot or cold constitutions. Such a concept, in my opinion, renders quibbling over the details of Ibn ʿArabi's ultimate position of soteriological universalism moot. See Khalil, *Islam*, 69.

[140] Mohammad Hassan Khalil, "Salvation and the 'Other' in Islamic Thought: The Contemporary Pluralism Debate (in English)," *Religion Compass* 5, no. 9 (2011): 512.

[141] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light*, 259 (emphasis mine).

[142] Huston Smith, "Is There a Perennial Philosophy?," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 3 (1987): 562 (emphasis mine). Smith here claims to follow in the position of "Rene Guenon, A. K. Coomaraswamy, Titus Burckhardt, Frithjof Schuon, Martin Lings, S. H. Nasr, and their like" (ibid., 560n11).

the part, not in the totality […]; but even in this case the part "is" totality *as far as its spiritual efficacy is concerned*.[143]

"Spiritual efficacy" is thus the ability of a religion to provide its adherents with symbolic truth that is attained through *gnosis*, which was identified by Nasr above as Ibn ʿArabi's "religion of love" and the "transcendent knowledge that reveals the inner unity of religions." Indeed, elsewhere Schuon uses precisely this idea of *gnosis* within a similar metaphor, asserting that "the various religions are like the beads of the rosary; the cord is gnosis, their single essence passing through them all."[144] Thus, "spiritual efficacy," "enlightening power," and "gnosis" are all synonymous terms for Schuon that denote religious experience *qua* intuitive knowledge, thus acknowledging a concomitant transcendent *a priori* of "true" or "valid" religion, i.e., "religion as such" or the Perennial Religion (*religio perennis*).

Since Ibn ʿArabi posits that all people will ultimately be saved no matter if they follow truth or not, and that such salvation may come after a "therapeutic" interim in Hell, the Perennialist assertion that all revealed religions are "valid" in that they lead to "the Real" cannot be considered in relation to Ibn ʿArabi's discourse merely in soteriological terms. Thus, the question persists whether Ibn ʿArabi's "universalism" remains on a purely soteriological level, or does it also accept, *in the interim*, the epistemological validity of religions other than Islam as having scriptural "*truth sufficient unto salvation*" like the Perennialists claim? It is to this question that we now turn.

Ibn ʿArabi and the Question of pre-Qur'anic Scriptural "Corruption" (*taḥrīf*)

Shah-Kazemi expresses what is implicit in Chittick's reading of Fut. III, 153 above

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[143] Schuon, *Gnosis*, 19-20 (emphasis mine).

[144] Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, 37.

when he states that Ibn ʿArabi "transforms the whole doctrine of abrogation from being a basis for the rejection of other religions *into a decisive argument for the validity of the other religions.*"[145] Yet, as was shown in chapter 1, additional textual evidence not discussed by either Chittick or Shah-Kazemi regarding Ibn ʿArabi's ideas on the topic of abrogation and its attendant solar metaphor shows that such a supposed universalist "transformation" of abrogation is untenable.

Here, it will be useful to briefly review some pertinent evidence presented in chapter 1. In a critical passage in the *Futūḥāt* (Fut. I, 145), Ibn ʿArabi emphatically acknowledges that Islam abrogated pre-Qur'anic religions. In this passage Ibn ʿArabi claims that God commands from the fourth heaven that Muhammad's revealed law abrogates "all revealed laws (*jamīʿ al-sharāʾiʿ*) and the triumph (*ẓuhūr*) of his religion (*dīn*) over all of the religions (*adyān*) of each messenger who preceded him and each revealed book."[146] Ibn ʿArabi goes on, however, to make two important qualifications regarding his doctrine of abrogation: (i) any ruling (*ḥukm*) from a previous revelation that is not abrogated and remains is thus subsumed within the "universal messengership" (*ʿumūm risāla*) of Muhammad, and (ii) the only exception to this is the case of the People of the Book. By paying the poll-tax (*jizya*), their act of subjugation causes their revealed laws to be subsumed *in toto* within the Muhammadan sharia. Ibn ʿArabi qualifies his statement about the "the people of the poll-tax (*jizya*)" further, however, by stating that their rulings have indeed been named "invalid" (*bāṭil*).[147] While this emphatic statement seems to directly contradict the passage cited in

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[145] Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence*, 121 (emphasis mine).

[146] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 182 (Fut. I, 145). See chapter 1, p. 79.

[147] Ibid.

Imaginal Worlds where Ibn 'Arabi states that the previous religions have decidedly *not* been rendered invalid,[148] the contradiction is resolved at the end of *Futūḥāt* I, 145 where Ibn 'Arabi asserts that even though such laws may be valid for the People of the Book who pay the poll-tax, the light of the stars (i.e., the revealed law of the People of the Book) "is subsumed (*indaraja*) within the light of the sun." He thus triumphantly asserts: "So, the day is ours, but the People of the Book only have the night, that is, if '*they offer the poll tax* (jizya) *in a willing state of subjugation*' (Qur'an 9:29)."[149]

While this and other evidence presented in chapter 1 clearly establishes Ibn 'Arabi's general avowal of abrogation as invalidating pre-Qur'anic religions, *pace* Chittick and Shah-Kazemi,[150] the subjugation of the "the People of the Poll-Tax (*jizya*)" and their backdoor entrance into the fold of Islam, albeit in an inferior "nocturnal" participation, presents a noteworthy variation on the theme of religious "validity." Here the heteronomous imposition of Islamic law appears to counter the autonomy of *gnosis* as the validating factor within the universalist discourse of Schuonian Perennialism. Yet, before offering additional textual evidence and further analysis, it is necessary to first look at more basic Perennialist claims regarding Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the scriptural "validity" of pre-Qur'anic revelation and his neglected discourse on the subject.

Shah-Kazemi notes that the type of "inclusivism" that "emerges naturally out of the principles of Ibn ʿArabī's hermeneutics" is that "he upholds and practises Islam in all its uniqueness, its *particularity*—even while recognising the truth and holiness in other religions

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[148] Ibn 'Arabi cited in Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 125. (Fut. III, 153).

[149] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 182 (Fut. I, 145). See chapter 1, p. 81.

[150] As was noted in chapter 1, this *qualified subjugation* of the People of the Book was repeated in Fut., I, 224, which related the strange tale of Ibn Barthalmā the monk. See chapter 1, p. 84. This assertion is found in multiple places in the *Futūḥāt*.

[…].”[151] Not surprisingly, Shah-Kazemi quotes Ibn ‘Arabi from Chittick's translation of Fut. III, 153 in *Imaginal Worlds* as a proof-text for this assertion: “we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all messengers and all the revealed religions.”[152] As Shah-Kazemi argues elsewhere, there are several Qur'anic passages that clearly corroborate this assertion, such as:

> *Say: We believe in God and that which is revealed unto us, and that which is revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and that which was given unto Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have submitted* (III:84).[153]

Yet, as was brought to light in chapter 1, the so-called call for religious pluralism in Qur'an 3:84 quoted by Shah-Kazemi here is the very verse that Ibn ‘Arabi “received” when he attained the Muhammadan Station (*muḥammadī al-maqām*) at the end of his ascension recounted in the *Futūḥāt*. Yet, rather than interpreting this verse as a call for religious universalism, Ibn ‘Arabi states that it was given to him as “the key to all knowledge” and thus a triumphal indication of his Muhammadan comprehensiveness as the totality of all previous prophetic understanding.[154]

Along with Ibn ‘Arabi, classical Islamic exegetes did not read verses like Qur'an 3:84 as a call for religious pluralism. Rather, they understood them as articulating a commonality of Prophetic renewal of one single religion (*al-dīn*). As Norman O. Brown notes

> Islam picks up and extends the notion, already present in Jewish (Ebionite) Christianity, of the unity of the prophetic spirit: *Christus aeternus, verus propheta ab initio mundi per saeculum currens*; the one true prophet, from age to age, from the beginning of the world;

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[151] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light*, 259-60.

[152] Ibn ‘Arabi cited in Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 125. (Fut. III, 153).

[153] Quoted in Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light*, xv, 156. See also Qur'an 42:13, 10:47, 41:43, 5:48, 2:62.

[154] See chapter 1, p. 57. Here it should be noted that Ibn ‘Arabi's reception of Qur'an 3:84 seems to accord to the literal interpretation of the very next Qur'anic verse: “*And who seeks a religion other than Islam* (al-islām)*, it will not be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter he will be from the losers*” (3:85).

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Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad. The later prophet comes to reiterate the Eternal and Everlasting Gospel—the "seim anew," *Lex mosaica per Jesum prophetam reformata*, the mosaic law reformed by Jesus the prophet. The tradition gets de-formed and has to be re-formed. Thus "true Christianity" is identical with "true Judaism" […].[155]

Similarly, the Qur'anic scholar Jane McAuliffe observers that classical Muslim exegetes understood "true" Christianity as those pre-Islamic Christians who embraced "that vision of Christian scripture that sees in it a prefiguration of the final Prophet."[156] Thus, as Jacques Waardenburg notes, the historical framework of medieval Islamic theology

> is not one in which different religions succeed each other in a continuous history. It is, rather, the history of the one religion which has been revealed intermittently and which perpetuates itself through multiple histories. This primordial religion was in particular realized in history through the "heavenly" or "revealed" prophetical religions with their historical variations.[157]

Within this medieval prophetology of continuous renewal, the Qur'an was thus understood to be the final revelation of previously revealed books, all sent down from the same heavenly source—the "mother of the book" (*umm al-kitāb*).[158] However, according to the Qur'an, some of the People of the Book were guilty of scriptural "corruption" (*taḥrīf*)[159] and "substitution" (*tabdīl*).[160] Yet, the exact meaning and ramifications of such assertions has been the subject of a long-standing debate amongst Muslim scholars.

In reference to Qur'anic passages in apparent support of the universal validity of other religions (e.g., 3:84 above), Shah-Kazemi himself notes, "many Muslims" assert "the

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[155] Norman O. Brown, *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 51.

[156] Jane McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 289.

[157] Jacques Waardenburg, "The Medieval Period 650–1500," in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 22.

[158] Qur'an 13:39 and 43:4. See Daniel A. Madigan, "Preserved Tablet," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 261-263.

[159] Qur'an 2:75, 4:46, and 5:13.

[160] Qur'an 2:59 and 7:162.

unreliability of the 'sacred books' revealed before the Qur'ān […] referred to as the doctrine of *taḥrīf* (alteration) […]."[161] As such, he argues that "[w]hile the Qur'an gives only a single actual instance of actual alteration (IV:46)," it also unconditionally relates that in both Jewish and Christian Scripture there is "*guidance and light*."[162] Shah-Kazemi goes on to make an argument for "[t]*he continuing validity* of the revealed Scriptures of the People of the Book."[163] He states:

> While […] the Qur'ān certainly castigates some of the People of the Book for some attitudes, this criticism does not extend to the sources of their tradition, sources which retain their value: otherwise the legal recognition and formal protection granted to them would be devoid of meaning, and their being referred to as 'People of the Book' would be both inaccurate and illogical.[164]

Shah-Kazemi here takes a particular stand on a very old exegetical argument that dates back to the very beginning of Muslim polemics against Jewish and Christian scripture regarding two distinct interpretations of what the Qur'anic accusation of *taḥrīf* implies. While some polemicists argued that *taḥrīf* referred to the "distortion of the text" (*taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*) itself, others claimed that it referred only to a "corruption of the meaning" (*taḥrīf al-maʿānī*).[165] In arguing that the sources of the People of the Book "retain their value," Shah-Kazemi not only directly supports a Schuonian framework for the universal validity of other religions, but he also endorses the exegetical conception that the Qur'an criticized the People of the Book for corrupting its texts only at the level of interpretation (*taḥrīf al-maʿānī*) and not for literal

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[161] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light*, 237.

[162] I.e., Qur'an 5:44, 46. Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light*, 237.

[163] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light*, 238 (emphasis mine).

[164] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light*, 237.

[165] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 10 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 111-112. See also Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible from Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: E. J Brill, 1996), 223.

"distortion of the text" (*taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*) itself.[166] While Shah-Kazemi's argument simply implies, but never claims, that Ibn 'Arabi took this particular view of *taḥrīf*, Chittick's treatment is at once more specific in such assertions and much less transparent about the exegetical debate it entails.

Although Chittick never mentions the technical terminology involved in the debate, Shah-Kazemi's above argument for *taḥrīf al-maʿānī* clearly echoes (in reverse order) the same assertions made by Chittick above regarding Ibn 'Arabi and *taḥrīf*.[167] Thus, Chittick states: "The Koran never criticizes the prophetic messages as such, but it often condemns misunderstandings or distortions by those who follow the prophets."[168] Chittick then acknowledges that Ibn 'Arabi confirms the Qur'anic assertion of scriptural "distortion" (i.e., *taḥrīf*): "The Shaykh sometimes criticizes specific distortions or misunderstandings in the Koranic vein [...]."[169] At the end of Chittick's discussion on abrogation (also quoted in chapter 1), he thus concludes:

> To maintain the particular excellence of the Koran and the superiority of Muhammad over all other prophets *is not to deny the universal validity of revelation* nor the necessity of revelation's appearing in particularized expressions. *Since all revealed religions are true in principle, the particular circumstances that lead one to suspect that they have been corrupted may change.*[170]

By claiming that Ibn 'Arabi's discourse confirms "the universal validity of revelation," Chittick, like Shah-Kazemi above, alludes to the Schuonian concept of the continued "spiritual efficacy" of contemporary religions, while Chittick's final assertion in this passage

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[166] See Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 223.

[167] Shah-Kazemi briefly mentions the two different arguments in a footnote. See Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light*, 237n49.

[168] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 125.

[169] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[170] Ibid., 125-26 (emphasis mine).

refs again to *taḥrīf.* Here, Chittick clearly argues for the corruption of meaning (*taḥrīf al- maʿānī*): "*Since all revealed religions are true in principle, the particular circumstances that lead one to suspect that they have been corrupted may change.*" Since the opposing idea of *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ* implies that the original text has been literally lost, Chittick's statement only makes sense in the context of "corruption of meaning" since such meaning could arguably be recoverable in the right circumstances. In other words, because all the revealed religions as they exist in their contemporary forms are *essentially* true, they cannot be permanently corrupted, only misunderstood.

It is necessary to pause here and look at how Chittick's articulation of *taḥrīf al-maʿānī* echoes Perennialist discourse in important ways. As a point of comparison, in the same article cited above, Huston Smith defines the nature of religious validity in Perennialist terms by noting that "[t]he great historical religions have survived for millenia [*sic*], which is what we would expect if they are divinely powered. Stated negatively, God would not have permitted them to endure for such stretches had they been founded on error."[171] In other words, while people may distort the "great historical religions" in their own personal understanding, they cannot distort them at base; because "true in principle," they are divinely protected.

Indeed, Ibn ʿArabi often makes assertions that could easily be read from within the Perennialist framework of the universal validity of religions. For example, in the first of two ascension narratives in the *Futūḥāt*, which offers an allegorical narration,[172] Ibn ʿArabi describes a symbolic vision at the foot of the *Tree of the Furthest Boundary* (*sidrat al-*

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[171] Smith, "Is There a Perennial Philosophy?," 562.

[172] I.e., chapter 167; the other biographical narrative is recounted in chapter 367 of the *Futūḥāt* and referred to in chapter 1, pp. 56-57.

muntahā) (Qurʾān 53:14) where three lesser rivers and their smaller tributaries emerge from a larger one. Here he relates that the larger river is the Qur'an, while the three emerging ones are the Torah, Psalms, and the Gospel, finally followed by the lesser revelations (*al-ṣuḥuf al-munzala*).[173] Ibn 'Arabi then makes a claim that at first glance appears to support a Schuonian model: he states that whoever has drank from any of these rivers becomes an inheritor (*wārith*) of their respective prophets, for "all are true, since they are the words of God."[174] However, he further clarifies thus:

> "The ulama are the inheritors of the prophets" in what they have drank from these rivers and tributaries. So commence (*ishraʿ*)[175] with the river of the Qur'an and you will triumph in each way of felicity, since it is the river of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, for whom prophethood was realized while Adam was between water and clay. And Muhammad was given "the comprehensive words" (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*) and was sent to all people (ʿ*āmma*). Thus, the branches of the rulings (*furūʿ al-aḥkām*) are abrogated (*naskh*) by him, but his ruling (*ḥukm*) is not abrogated by another.[176]

By following his assertion that whoever has drank the scriptural rivers becomes an inheritor (*wārith*) of their respective prophets with the famous hadith "the ulama are the inheritors of the prophets,"[177] Ibn 'Arabi clarifies that he here is speaking about the religious "scholars" who have come *after* the advent of Muhammad (i.e., the Muslim ulama). Indeed, in the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn 'Arabi directly comments on this hadith, noting that even though the death of the Prophet put an end to law-giving prophethood (*nubūwat al-tashrīʿ*), God gave His servants the ability to continue, in a sense, such law-giving through legal reasoning (*al-ijtihād*). The "inheritance" to which the above hadith refers, states Ibn 'Arabi, "is none other than the

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[173] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 3, 325 (Fut. II, 279-280).

[174] Ibid. (Fut., II, 280).

[175] Here the imperative of *sharaʿa* denotes to begin or commence, but also to prescribe.

[176] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 3, 325 (Fut. II, 280).

[177] Hadith; e.g., Bukhārī, *al-ʿIlm*, 10.

ulama's use of legal reasoning to arrive at rulings and thus legislate them."[178] Like Ibn

'Arabi's story of Ibn Barthalmā discussed in chapter 1, which claimed that after the advent of

the prophet Muhammad a saintly "heir" (*wārith*) of a prophet other than Muhammad will still

necessarily follow the sharia of Muhammad since it abrogates previous revealed laws,[179] here

Ibn 'Arabi instructs the Muslim ulama to drink from the supreme river of the Qur'an, which

he not only associates directly with Muhammad, but also with his exoteric sharia and its

abrogative supersession of all previous laws.

Thus in the "visionary" passage above, Ibn 'Arabi's discourse appears to deploy a

hadith in an "exoteric" fashion as a modality of his triumphal discourse of Muhammadan

comprehensiveness discussed in chapter 1. As Morris importantly notes, a distinctive feature

of Ibn 'Arabi's writing is "spiritual literalism," i.e., Ibn 'Arabi's "constant insistence on the

ultimate coincidence (not simply in outward formulation) between the precise, revealed

literal formulations of the Koran and hadith and their essential spiritual truth and intentions

as realized and verified by the saints."[180] Itzchak Weismann has similarly observed that a

close examination of the *Futūḥāt* reveals that Ibn 'Arabi's "thought was basically a

meticulous, though unbound by reason, *literal interpretation* of the scriptures."[181]

It is thus my contention here, and throughout this study, that Ibn 'Arabi's "spiritual

literalism" is nowhere more apparent than in his rather polemical statements regarding *naskh*

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[178] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 134-35.

[179] As Ibn 'Arabi states, "Do you think that monk remained on the rulings (*aḥkām*) of the Christians? No, by God, the sacred law (*sharīʿa*) of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, is abrogative (*nāsikha*)!" Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 273 (Fut. I, 224). See chapter 1, p. 83.

[180] James Morris, "Ibn 'Arabi's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority," *Studia Islamica* 71 (1990): 45.

[181] Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 144 (emphasis mine).

and *taḥrīf*; i.e., the abrogative function of Muhammad's legal dispensation, as detailed in chapter 1, and the attendant idea that the pre-Qur'ânic scriptures were distorted. In such discourse, Ibn 'Arabi' appears to forcefully echo—albeit in a more "spiritualized" fashion—one of his most intellectually formidable religious heroes and fellow Andalusian, the famous Ẓāhirī scholar and polemicist Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064).

After having a profound dream of Ibn Ḥazm in his early life in which he witnessed his Andalusian predecessor embracing the Prophet in a cloud of light,[182] Ibn 'Arabi assiduously studied and transcribed his works.[183] Although Ibn 'Arabi scholar Michel Chodkiewicz recognizes the "undeniable" influence of the Ẓāhirī school upon Ibn 'Arabi's legal ideas, he staunchly refutes Goldziher's often cited claim that Ibn 'Arabi was a Ẓāhirī.[184] Since Ibn 'Arabi himself denied legal affiliation with Ibn Ḥazm, Chodkiewicz argues that Ibn 'Arabi was actually the founder of his own "Akbarian school of jurisprudence," which he rather adulatingly asserts was "the most irenic, the most conciliatory of all those that Islam has known."[185] Similarly, Morris notes that Goldziher's assertion is based on "superficial

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[182] Ibn 'Arabi's recounting of this dream in the introduction of *Ibṭal al-qiyās wa-l-ra'y wa-l-istiḥsān wa-l-taqlīd wa-l-taʿlīl* was first noted in the West by Goldziher in *Die Ẓâhiriten* in 1884. See Ignaz Goldziher, *The Ẓāhirīs: Their Doctrine and their History*, trans. and ed. Wolfgang Behn (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 170. This incident is also recorded in the *Futūḥāt* (Fut. II, 519).

[183] Not only did Ibn 'Arabi personally transcribe Ibn Ḥazm's treatise attacking analogical and discretional reasoning, *Ibṭāl al-qiyās wa-l-ra'y* (legal methodologies Ibn 'Arabi also disavowed), he wrote an abridgement of Ibn Hazm's thirty volume treatise on legal theory, *al-Muḥallā bi al-āthār*. See Gerald T. Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time: Ibn al-'Arabî's Book of the Fabulous Gryphon* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 42; and Cyrille Chodkiewicz, "The Law and the Way," in *The Meccan Revelations,* ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, vol. 2 (New York: Pir Press, 2004), 61.

[184] See Goldziher, *The Ẓāhirīs*, 171.

[185] Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean without Shore: Ibn 'Arabî, the Book, and the Law*, trans. David Streight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 55.

resemblances" such as the disavowal of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) by Ibn 'Arabi.[186] Yet, in

opposition to such assertions, Gerald Elmore trenchantly points out that no self-respecting

Ẓāhirī would agree to being labeled as one.[187] Similarly, as Adam Sabra recently observes:

> Ẓāhirism cannot be called a *madhhab,* since it rejects the division of believers into experts
> and laypersons, the fundamental basis for the establishment of a school of law. […] The
> nature of Ibn Ḥazm's method is that it perpetually seeks the correct interpretation of the
> Qur'ānic text, and that it seeks to establish the canon of authentic traditions and to interpret
> them.[188]

While Ibn Ḥazm's above method was necessarily rationalist, such principles are

undoubtedly present in Ibn 'Arabi's approach to jurisprudence, albeit within a supra-rational

criteria of spiritual unveiling (*kashf*). Indeed, Ibn 'Arabi's entire hermeneutical approach

seems to be an outgrowth of Ibn Ḥazm's, which strove to obtain "the maximum utility from

the fixed canon of sacred texts."[189] Thus, for Ibn Ḥazm "when a word has more than one

meaning, one must not restrict it to one meaning. All possible meanings are valid, provided

they do not result in a logical absurdity."[190] Similarly, for Ibn 'Arabi, as Chodkiewicz notes,

"rigorous fidelity to the letter of Revelation does not exclude but, on the contrary, it implies a

multiplicity of interpretations."[191] While it can be compellingly argued that Ibn 'Arabi's

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[186] Morris, "Ibn 'Arabi's 'Esotericism'," 61n52. Indeed, the similarities between what Ibn 'Arabi considered to
be the only valid sources of the law and Ibn Ḥazm's Ẓāhirī position are striking (e.g., a literal but wide
interpretation of the Qur'an and ḥadith, a general prohibition against *qiyās*, and the location of *ijmāʿ* only
amongst the Companions of the Prophet). See Cyrille Chodkiewicz, "The Law and the Way," in Ibn 'Arabi, *The
Meccan Revelations*, vol. 2, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz (New York: Pir Press, 2004), 61; and R. Arnaldez, "Ibn
Ḥazm, Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. Saʿīd" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Leiden: E. J.
Brill), 790-99.

[187] Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 43n161.

[188] Adam Sabra, "Ibn Ḥazm's Literalism: A Critique of Islamic Legal Theory (I)," *Al-Qantara* 28, no. 1 (2007):
22.

[189] Ibid., 17.

[190] Ibid.

[191] Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean without Shore: Ibn ʿArabî, the Book, and the Law*, trans. David Streight
(Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 30.

methodology often evinces more of a *promiscuity* rather than "fidelity" to the Qur'anic Arabic he interprets,[192] it is his discursive *claim* to fidelity within such a polysemic context that so closely resembles Ibn Ḥazm's Ẓāhirī principles above.

Indeed, by all indications—methodological and historical—Ibn ʿArabi was part of what Elmore refers to as an "avant-garde" movement of "Ḥazmism" in Seville, where Ẓāhirism "became the official law of the land" under the reform campaign of the Almohad caliph Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr (r. 1184-99) against the Mālikīs.[193] Indeed, as Camilla Adang notes, the tension between the Mālikīs and the Ẓāhirīs appears to have been formative in Ibn Ḥazm's own position regarding the abrogation (*naskh*) of Mosaic law by the sharia of Muhammad and the supremacy of Islam over Judaism[194]:

> Ibn Ḥazm's demonstration of the abrogation of the Mosaic law is not primarily meant to convince the Jews of the antiquated nature of their scripture, but seems above all at reminding his fellow-Muslims that the only valid canonical law is the Islamic *sharīʿa* […] and that it is therefore not permitted to follow the laws of Moses or any other prophet apart from Muhammad. This he deemed necessary, since he had noticed that a number of Muslims, or, to be more specific, Mālikīs, displayed tendencies which might be termed "Judaizing".[195]

In light of the historical tension between the Mālikīs and Ẓāhirīs in Ibn ʿArabi's native Seville and his deep affinity for Ibn Ḥazm's intellectual approach,[196] Ibn ʿArabi's

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[192] As Ata Anzali has recently argued in an unpublished paper: "The Primordial Tension of the Hidden (*bāṭin*) versus the Manifest (*dhāhir*): the Case of Ibn ʿArabī and his Qurʾanic Hermeneutics."

[193] Elmore also notes that Ibn ʿArabi was indeed labeled a Ẓāhirī "propagandist" by the biographical historian Aḥmad b. Muhammad Ibn Khallikān (d. 1282). Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 42-44, 45.

[194] For a detailed overview of Ibn Ḥazm's position on the abrogation of Mosaic law see Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 216-22.

[195] Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 221.

[196] While Ibn Ḥazm was above all a rationalist and dialectician—and not a Sufi in any "normative" sense—it is certainly the case that many aspects of his literalist approach to religion were conducive to Sufism. As Elmore notes, this is particularly true with "the uncompromising, *monistic* variety of Ibn al-ʿArabī, for whom the obvious 'Outer' was ever the inalienable manifestation of the unseen 'Inner'." Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 44. Indeed, Goldziher had himself noted how "exponents of Ṣūfism were so easily accommodated within the frame of the Ẓāhirite school." Ignaz Goldziher, *The Ẓāhirīs*, 165.

above vision of a Qur'anic urtext at the foot of the *Tree of the Furthest Boundary* takes on a

particularly existential hue. Given the fact that the audience Ibn ʿArabi wrote for can be

broadly defined as an intellectual Muslim elite "composed mainly of religious scholars,"[197]

his more polemical statements regarding pre-Qur'anic revelation do not appear to be made in

dialogue with non-Muslims in an attempt to convert or debate them. Indeed, in a telling

passage found in the introduction of the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn ʿArabi echoes both Ibn Ḥazm and al-

Ghazālī in a discussion about the direct power of the Qur'an for salvation and the limited

utility of other sciences such as speculative theology (*kalām*)[198]:

> A great wealth is contained in the Mighty Qur'an for the intelligent person, and for one who
> has a chronic disease it is a remedy and a healing. As God said: "*We reveal from within the
> Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy for the believers*" (17:82). It is a sufficient
> healing for one who has undertaken the way of salvation (*ṭarīq al-najāh*), has desired to
> ascend the ranks, and has left the sciences that produce perplexity and doubts, for they waste
> time and induce animosity.
>
> If that way is embraced, then it must be said that such a person will not be safe from that
> which excites to enmity or being preoccupied with rehearsals and dialectical refinement so
> that all his free moments will be sunk in repelling unreal opponents and refuting specious
> arguments that may or may not transpire.
>
> *If they do, then the sword of the sharia is the most repellent and cutting*! "I have been
> commanded to fight people until they say 'there is no god but God' and until they believe in
> me and what I have brought." This is the Prophet's statement, may God bless him and grant
> him peace. He did not oblige us to argue with them when they are present; *rather, (our
> recourse) is to jihad and the sword* if they have been openly resistant (*ʿānada*) to what has
> been declared.[199]

While Ibn ʿArabi's language here straddles double registers of literalism and allegory, given

the similar discursive bellicosity in his advice to Kaykāʾus, the Seljuk Sultan of Anatolia, as

discussed in chapter 1, there is no reason to doubt his commitment to both. Yet, irrespective

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[197] James W. Morris, "Ibn ʿArabi's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority," *Studia Islamica* 71 (1990): 38.

[198] For the similarities between al-Ghazālī and Ibn Ḥazm regarding theology see Anwar G. Chejne, *Ibn Hazm* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1982), 80.

[199] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 54 (Fut. I, 35).

of how seriously his jihadist rhetoric was intended, his concern is clearly not to dialectically

convince the "openly resistant." In light of such avowals, Ibn ʿArabi's emphatic claim in his

ascension narrative above that by beginning "with the river of the Qur'an," one "will triumph

in each way of felicity" combined with his following statement that Muhammad's law

abrogates but is not abrogated seems to be addressed primarily to his co-religionists who may

have been tempted, like the Mālikīs according to Ibn Ḥazm, to incorporate aspects of other

religious practice or discourse into Islam—particularly that transmitted from the rabbinic

tradition.[200]

Indeed, such an assertion is found in a passage at the very end of chapter 157 in the

Futūḥāt, where Ibn ʿArabi rails against the "Tales of the Prophets" (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*) or

Isrāʾīliyyāt literature. As Gordon Newby notes, "the circulation of non-Islamic materials for

use as the basis for Qurʾân commentary"—particularly that derived from rabbinic sources—

"was present during Muḥammad's lifetime and saw a considerable increase in the two

generations after his death."[201] This tradition was continued not only by early proto-Sufis

such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728) and al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857) who used such sources freely, but

also by later figures like Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1038) and al-Ghazālī who also

apparently employed them without question.[202] While the embellishments of the story tellers

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[200] Even though Ibn ʿArabi has no sustained polemic against the People of the Book, as does Ibn Ḥazm in several of his major works, his mention of them in the passages examined here echo the vitriol for which Ibn Ḥazm was infamous. For a brief survey of Ibn Ḥazm's polemical works against Judaism and Christianity see Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 64-69. Moreover, not only did Ibn ʿArabi's conception of the sharia seem to parallel perfectly Ibn Ḥazm's in terms of content (i.e., as the Qur'an, *sunna*, jurisprudence, and theology), he also agreed that out of all previous revealed law, Muhammad's law is the only one remaining that contains the complete truth "that should be known and followed without the slightest deviation." Anwar G. Chejne, *Ibn Hazm* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1982), 109.

[201] Gordon D. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia: From Ancient Times to Their Eclipse Under Islam* (Columbia, S.C. : University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 66.

[202] See G. Vajda, "Isrāʾīliyyāt," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 212.

(*quṣṣāṣ*) became a standard subject of scorn by the fourteenth century for scholars such as

Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373),[203] many of the earliest critics of story tellers were Sufis like Abū Ṭālib

al-Makkī (d. 996).[204]

In the following passage, Ibn ʿArabi, like his predecessor al-Makkī, draws a line

between the "assemblies of remembrance" (*majālis al-dhikr*),[205] which according to the

tradition of hadith are visited by the angels, and the "lies" of the story tellers that result in

angelic rejection. As such, Ibn ʿArabi admonishes the leader of assemblies of remembrance

"to avoid calamities in his lesson," by which he means transmitting fabrications that the Jews

made about their prophets commonly used in Qurʾanic commentary (*tafsīr*). Thus, Ibn ʿArabi

counsels such leaders:

> It is necessary to aspire for the truth and not go into what the historians have narrated, on the authority of the Jews, about the (imagined) transgressions of those whom God praised and selected, and thus not take such narrations as commentary on the Book of God, saying, "the commentators have said…"

> It is not appropriate to present such calamities as commentary on the speech of God like the tale of Joseph (*qiṣṣat yūsuf*) and David and those similar, peace be upon them, and Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, by means of perverted interpretations and on the authority of people with baseless chains of transmission who said concerning God what God did not mention about the prophets. If the leader relates the like of this in his assembly, the angels will abhor and eschew him, and God will abhor him as well. Indeed, the person who (habitually tries to) find a dispensation in his religion will use such tales to support his disobedience and say: "If the prophets had fallen into situations like this, then who am I (to not do the same)?"—God forbid!

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[203] Ibid.

[204] Indeed, al-Makkī distinguished between the disciplined Sufi "assemblies of remembrance" (*majālis al-dhikr*) and the inferior meetings of the story tellers (*majālis al-quṣṣāṣ*), which he felt were merely gatherings for the *hoi polloi*. Moreover, he "also objected to the storytellers' recitation of false traditions." Jonathan P. Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 27, 103n30.

[205] As Massignon notes, such *majālis al-dhikr* were originally sessions in which practitioners "recited sections of the Qurʾān, as well as prose and verse on related themes for meditation." Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, trans. Benjamin Clark (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 73.

> I swear by God that the prophets are far from what has been ascribed to them by the Jews, God curse them (*laʿanahum allāh*)! […] So, the establishment of the sanctity of the prophets (*ḥurmat al-anbiyāʾ*), upon them be peace, and having shame (*al-ḥayāʾ*) before God is obligatory upon the leader of the assembly who should not follow what the Jews have claimed to be the truth regarding the defects of the prophets, nor should he follow the writing of (their) exegetes—God forsake them (*khadhalahum allāh)*![206]

While such vituperative language against the People of the Book is extremely rare for Ibn ʿArabi, this being the only passage in the *Futūḥāt* that I am aware of with specific curses against them, it is also the case that the *Futūḥāt* is not a polemical work. Yet, as was shown in chapter 1, Ibn ʿArabi was not entirely adverse to polemical statements against the Jews and Christians. Indeed, the topic of disrespect against the prophets in the above passage seems to have sufficiently raised Ibn ʿArabi's ire to warrant curses against them, and his rhetoric here strongly echoes the polemical style of Ibn Ḥazm who often hurled similar imprecations.[207] Indeed, as Theodore Pulcini notes, "Perhaps the most impassioned charge Ibn Ḥazm brings against the Jewish scriptures is that they contradict the Islamic doctrine of *ʿiṣma*, i.e., they violate the principle that the prophets are immune from error and sin."[208] The following lines contained in Ibn Ḥazm's *Kitāb al-fiṣal* similarly attack what he considered Jewish lies against the prophets in the Torah: "Of David they say that he openly committed adultery with the virtuous wife of one of his soldiers […]. Not to mention the lies they impute to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph […]. God's curse and His wrath be upon everyone who gives credence to any of these lies!"[209]

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[206] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 3, 298 (Fut. II, 256).

[207] Indeed, Ibn Ḥazm liked to curse the Jews so much he included such in the title of one of his major works, i.e., *Refutation of Ibn al-Naghrīla the Jew, May God Curse Him* (*al-Radd ʿalāʾ ibn al-naghrīla al-yahūdī, laʿanahuʾ llāh*). See Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 67.

[208] Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 59-60. See also Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible from Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: E. J Brill, 1996), 239-240.

[209] Ibn Ḥazm cited in Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 240.

Indeed, it was Ibn Ḥazm's systematic polemical attack on Judaism and his allegations that not only had Mosaic law been subject to abrogation (*naskh*) by the sharia of Muhammad, but that the text of the Torah itself had actually been irretrievably altered (i.e., *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*) that changed the way Muslim scholars approached the scriptures of the People of the Book.[210] Before Ibn Ḥazm, most scholars subscribed to the more moderate conception of scriptural alteration that held the meaning of the text to have been distorted (i.e., *taḥrīf al-maʿānī*), while the integrity of the text itself remained unchanged.[211]

In contradistinction to Chittick's assertion in *Imaginal Worlds,* as discussed above, that Ibn ʿArabi adhered to the more liberal view of *taḥrīf al-maʿānī*, the Andalusian Sufi appears to follow Ibn Ḥazm and the more extreme position of *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*. While there are several statements in the *Futūḥāt* where Ibn ʿArabi emphatically asserts that the Qurʾan is protected from *taḥrīf* (and various analogous terms),[212] as opposed to "the other revealed books,"[213] there is one particular passage remarkable for its metaphysical context. It appears in the second ascension narrative in the *Futūḥāt* (i.e., chapter 367)[214] and comes in the final section where Ibn ʿArabi describes his visionary experience after he attained to the "Muhammadan Station" (*muḥammadī al-maqām*), as mentioned in chapter 1.[215] It is in this section that he narrates a long list of visions of particular types of knowledge—each beginning with "And I saw…" (*wa raʾaitu*). As James Morris notes, this list differs from

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[210] Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf," 112. See also Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 246-48, 251.

[211] Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 251.

[212] E.g., "addition" (*al-ziyāda*) and "substitution" (*tabdīl*).

[213] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 6, 76 (Fut. III, 360). See also ibid., vol. 8, 153 (Fut. IV, 417).

[214] Ibid., vol. 6, 54-70 (Fut., III, 340-54).

[215] Ibid., 65 (Fut. III, 350). See chapter 1, p. 57.

similar listings in the other chapters contained in the section of "spiritual abodes" (*faṣl al-manāzil*) of the *Futūḥāt*[216] (in which chapter 367 is included) in that "it contains a number of Ibn 'Arabî's most fundamental metaphysical theses."[217]

Yet, no mention of the following passage is made by Morris, or any other Western scholar of Ibn 'Arabi that I am aware, since its synthesis of the highest mode of visionary experience with a clear disavowal of the authenticity of the Torah is a circle difficult to square for those who wish to project Ibn 'Arabi as universally accepting the validity of the religions of his day. Here, Ibn 'Arabi states:

> And I saw (*wa raʾaitu*) the Torah and the specific knowledge that God wrote in it by His own hand. But I was astonished at how, even though He wrote it by His own (single) hand, God did not protect it from substitution (*al-tabdīl*) and alteration (*al-taḥrīf*) by the Jews, the companions of Moses, who changed (*ḥarrafa*) it! Just as I was so astonished, I was spoken to secretly; I heard the address, but what is more, I saw the very speaker, and I witnessed him in an expansive mercy in which I stood and which surrounded me. He said to me: "More astonishing than that, is that He created Adam by his two hands and He did not protect him from disobedience and forgetfulness—where is the rank of one hand compared to that of two!" How astonishing indeed! The two hands were turned only towards his clay and his nature. And because Satan whispered to him, the whispering came only to him from the direction of his nature. And Satan is created from part of what Adam was created from.[218] It was only by his own nature that Adam forgot and yielded to the whispering, and it was upon his nature that the two hands were turned. For that reason, He did not protect Adam from the disobedience of his own offspring, which he carried within his own clay.
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> So, do not be astonished by the Jews changing the Torah, since the Torah was not changed in its pure form, but rather change has befallen it by their writing it and their verbalizing it. This was referred to by the speech of God when He said: "*they knowingly altered it after they*

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[216] There are a total of 6 sections within the *Futūḥāt*, the *faṣl al-manāzil* being the fourth and includes chapters 270-383 (Fut. II, 571-III, 523). For a brief overview of each section of the *Futūḥāt* see Michel Chodkiewicz, "Toward Reading the *Futûhât Makkiyya*," in *The Meccan Revelations,* vol. 2, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz (New York: Pir Press, 2004), 7-11.

[217] James W. Morris, "Ibn 'Arabî's Spiritual Ascension," in *The Meccan Revelations*, vol. 1, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz (New York: Pir Press, 2002), 229.

[218] Ibn 'Arabi holds to the traditional view that Satan was a jinn. As such, Satan's elemental makeup is predominantly the elements of fire and air, whereas Adam's is water and earth. However, Ibn 'Arabi acknowledges that as created beings, they each have something of all four elements. See William C. Chittick, "Iblīs and the Jinn in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*," in *Classical Arabic Humanities in Their Own Terms: Festschrift for Wolfhart Heinrichs on his 65th Birthday Presented by his Students and Colleagues*, ed. Beatrice Gruendler (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 104.

understood it."[219] The Jews knew that the words of God were understood (by many) among them, yet what they disclosed in their transcription (of the Torah) contradicted what was in their hearts and what was in their revealed book (*muṣḥafihim al-munzal*). They only changed it when they copied it from the original, while knowledge of the original remained for those scribes and their scholars.

Thus, even though Adam was with the two hands (of God), he disobeyed by himself and he was not protected like the speech of God, which is even more astonishing. Rather, the speech of God was safeguarded (*ʿaṣima*) because it is a (divine) ruling (*ḥukm*). And the ruling is inviolable (*maʿṣūm*), but its abode is with the scholars. So what was with the scholars was changed, which they did for their followers. And Adam is not a ruling of God, so it is not imperative for him to be safeguarded in himself, but safeguarding (*al-ʿiṣma*) is imperative in what is conveyed from his Lord with respect to the ruling (*al-ḥukm*) when he was a messenger, and so it is for all of the messengers. This is noble knowledge (*ʿilm sharīf*).[220]

In this passage, remarkable for its amalgamation of visionary experience and polemical theology, Ibn ʿArabi explains the metaphysical reasons behind the seemingly astonishing fact that the Torah could have been physically changed even though, as the speech of God, it must be inviolable (*maʿṣūm*). Yet, even more amazing, according to Ibn ʿArabi, is how Adam disobeyed God, even though he was made with both of God's hands. Thus, in a notably sober mood, Ibn ʿArabi sets forth an argument distinguishing God's transcendent perfection in opposition to the nature of His creation, no matter how enlightened.

Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) was perhaps the first to argue that in addition to a genuine Torah, which was burned, lost, and then miraculously restored by Ezra,[221] there was a second text written by a group of rabbis and mistakenly taken as the original by the Jews of al-Ṭabarī's day.[222] Ibn Ḥazm similarly held that the Torah was destroyed and rewritten by Ezra. Instead

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[219] Qur'an 2:75.

[220] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 6, 66 (Fut. III, 351).

[221] Al-Ṭabarī builds on the story of Ezra as one of the pious captives in Babylon who returned to Palestine and grieved over the loss of the Torah. An angel came to him and gave him a drink which allowed him to write down the entire Torah, thus restoring it and establishing it among the Jews in Palestine. After his death, however, the Jews considered Ezra to be the son of God as mentioned in the Qur'an: "*The Jews said Ezra* ('Uzair) *is the son of God, and the Christians said Christ is the son of God*" (9:30). See Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 230-31.

[222] Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 231.

of a miraculous restoration, however, Ezra radically changed the Torah into an invalid forgery.[223] Ibn Ḥazm anticipated objections to his extreme assertion of *taḥrīf* that would argue, as Shah-Kazemi does above, that the Qur'an itself claims that the Torah contains "*guidance and light*."[224] While such a divine Torah exists, according to Ibn Ḥazm, it is not the one possessed by the Jews. Rather, the true Torah along with the Gospel was taken up by Jesus when he ascended to heaven.[225] While Ibn ʿArabi does not rehearse this particular narrative in the passage above, he clearly holds the same idea, i.e., that while the Torah remains intact "in its pure form," the written and verbalized form was textually changed. The metaphorical paradox, of course, is that Adam, as a messenger and perfected human, is both the channel of a protected divine message and the simultaneous cause of its corruption. Moreover, there is a concurrent subtext of the superiority of Muhammad here, whose own revelation is the only one granted protection in both the heavenly and earthly realms. Indeed, it is to this special nature of the Muhammadan dispensation and its apparent ability to remain protected, but also to redeem prior dispensations, that we now turn.

The Efficacy of Subjugation: A Heteronomous Model

We have now come full circle to the question of Ibn ʿArabi's position on the "validity" of religions other than Islam and the problem presented by "the People of the Poll-Tax" in chapter 1. Having decidedly established Ibn ʿArabi's discursive position regarding scriptural corruption (*taḥrīf*)—in addition to abrogation (*naskh*)—it is now possible to more

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[223] Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 246-246.

[224] Qur'an 5:44.

[225] Thus, according to Ibn Ḥazm, the only way that Jews and Christians can fulfill the injunctions of their divine revelations and attain to salvation is by embracing Islam and following the sharia of Muhammad. See Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 248.

fully situate the limited validity Ibn 'Arabi gives to the People of the Poll-Tax and

conclusively determine if such validity has *any* correspondence to the epistemological

universalism of Schuonian Perennialism and its claim that all orthodox religions contain

"*truth sufficient unto salvation*" as discussed in the excursus above.

In yet another passage from the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn 'Arabi qualifies the relationship of the

People of the Book to Islam through their payment of the poll-tax. Not only does Ibn 'Arabi

again sanction their "qualified subjugation," but he also relates that through such subjugation

the People of the Book are granted salvific "felicity" (*saʿāda*). In the following passage, Ibn

'Arabi specifically discusses "the Followers of the Books who pay the poll-tax" (*aṣḥāb al-

kutub bi al-jizya*) and states:

> Their remaining upon their religion (*dīn*) was prescribed (*shrara*ʿ) by God for them on the
> tongue of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace. So their giving the poll-tax
> (*al-jizya*) benefits them if it is taken under the threat of force and as a humiliation for them,
> since (under such conditions) they have fulfilled their obligation.[226] This, then, is their portion
> from the revealed law (*al-sharīʿa*) (of Muhammad), and they are allowed to remain upon
> their divine law (*shar*ʿ), which is, as such, Muhammadan law (*sharʿ muḥammadī*). So they
> attain to felicity by that, but those who exceed the proper bounds will be punished from the
> law that they are upon.[227]

Thus, despite his various admonishments of the People of the Book for their unbelief (*kufr*)

and associationism (*shirk*) discussed in chapter 1, here Ibn 'Arabi asserts that through the

fulfillment of the Qur'anic command of humiliation (9:29) Jews and Christians can

presumably be spared the torments of Hell.[228]

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[226] I.e., under the conditions of Qur'an 9:29. See chapter 1, pp. 81-82.

[227] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 5, 168 (Fut. III, 145).

[228] Although the word "felicity" (*saʿāda*) can mean both worldly and eternal happiness, Ibn 'Arabi's famous
Syrian commentator ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1731) acknowledged the possibility of both interpretations
of this passage. Regarding the latter, he states: "These *ḏimmīs* would be those about whom it is said that they
gained the happiness which is free from all misery, just by giving the *ǧizya* […]." Al-Nābulusī quoted in
Michael Winter, "A Polemical Treatise by ʿAbd al-Ġanī al-Nābulusī against a Turkish Scholar on the Religious
Status of the Ḏimmīs," *Arabica* 35, no. 1 (1988): 97, 99.

While this passage succinctly confirms the argument proffered in chapter 1—i.e., that according to Ibn 'Arabi, Judaism and Christianity can only be considered "valid" religions if their adherents submit to Qur'an 9:29—it additionally throws into relief how Ibn 'Arabi understands such validity. Thus, in sharp contrast to the Schuonian notion of "spiritual efficacy" via transcendent *gnosis* of symbolic truth, the spiritual efficacy of Judaism and Christianity is here shown to be solely determined by *obedience* to the revelation of Muhammad and *not* to any "truth sufficient unto salvation" granted to the Torah or Gospel. While Jews and Christians appear to remain disbelievers/infidels and their revelations corrupted, their payment of the *jizya* "under the threat of force and as a humiliation" fulfills *their particular* Qur'anic scriptural "obligation," and they are thus coercively subsumed within the cosmographical sovereignty of Muhammad.

Conclusion: A Discursive Field Revealed

Rather than the efficacy of Judaism and Christianity having anything to do with autonomous "experience," for Ibn 'Arabi these religions achieve validity only by a fully heteronomous process of forceful subjugation to the Islamic sharia or not at all. Indeed, as mentioned in chapter 1, Ibn 'Arabi defined "religion" as "obedience" (*inqiyād*),[229] and such a definition replicates a theological principle at work within early Islamic technical terminology. As Louis Gardet importantly points out, *pace* Wilfred Cantwell Smith,[230] the identification of the technical term *islām* with obedience to the particular message of the

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[229] See chapter 1, p. 46.

[230] In *The Meaning and End of Religion*, W. C. Smith famously argues that the verbal noun *islām* originally denoted "a personal commitment to heed God's voice," and only through a modern process of gradual reification (marked by a sea change in the 19th century) became identified with the religion of Islam, i.e., the historical community of Muhammad and obedience to his sharia. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 112-18.

Prophet Muhammad happens early on in Islamic history and is reflected in early theological

writing such as the so-called *Fiqh Akbar II* (circa tenth century C.E.):

> [*I*]*slām* is indeed, as the *Fiḳh Akbar II* says, a surrender (*taslīm*) to the divine Will as *expressed* by the ḳurʾānic teaching, and an obedience (*inḳiyād*) to His commandments; and, by this very means, admission to the Community […]. Quite soon, admission to the Community was to be the aspect preferred. If the requisite inner attitude does not correspond to it, there is some grave individual failing (*fiṣk*), there is no abandonment of *islām*.[231]

As noted above, Ibn ʻArabi's concordance with any such formal "exoteric" theology has

often been imagined to be a political ruse. Indeed, even Chittick, whose work has been

particularly noted as emphasizing "Ibn ʿArabi's respect for the revealed Law,"[232] takes

apologetic recourse to such explanations in the face of Ibn ʻArabi's criticism of the People of

the Book, which nonetheless he never fully divulges.[233]

    While Ibn ʻArabi did not focus on inter-religious polemics like his intellectual

predecessor Ibn Ḥazm, the evidence presented above shows that his metaphysical ideas were

forged within a *habitus* that took such notions for granted. Indeed, Ibn ʻArabi's position on

Judaism and Christianity parallels the polemical framework of his medieval milieu. As

Waardenburg observes:

> Just as the Qurʾān had been declared to be the uncreated an infallible Word of God, in the second half of the ninth century C.E., so Muhammad's status as the infallible seal of the prophets proclaiming definite truth was fixed. The three issues of *naskh*, *tahrīf*, and *prophethood* […] formed the basis for the *mutakallimūn*'s polemics against Christianity, as they did for their polemics against Judaism.[234]

As we saw above, Ibn ʻArabi's incorporation and metaphysical synthesis of each of these

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[231] L. Gardet, "Islām," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 174.

[232] Knysh asserts that Chittick's *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* "emphasizes that Ibn ʿArabi's respect for the revealed Law, which is evident from the *Futuhat*, was his genuine concern, not just 'a window dressing,' as some Western writers suggested." Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 20.

[233] See chapter 1, pp. 26-7, and p. 122 above.

[234] Waardenburg, "The Medieval Period," 44.

three main polemical issues (i.e., *naskh*, *taḥrīf*, and *prophethood*) clearly shows that he took them seriously.

Thus, in spite of repeated Perennialist claims that Ibn ʿArabi upheld the validity of all contemporaneous religions after the advent of Islam, and by doing so transcended the Aristotelian law of non-contradiction, the dearth of actual textual evidence in support of such assertions is telling. While the evidence offered above regarding Ibn ʿArabi's absolute supersessionism—and subsequent upholding of the law of non-contradiction—provides much support for a long overdue reassessment of his supposed religious "universalism," it does not necessarily make Perennialist authors like Shah-Kazemi and Almirzanah guilty of covering up what may prove to be unknown textual evidence. Indeed, the question of individual intentions has not been my concern here. Rather, through a comparative method of analysis, I have attempted to bring to light a larger discursive regime by revealing the rules of formation that have sustained Ibn ʿArabi's Western discursive image as a universalist.

Yet, here it should be noted that the Perennialist discursive field has boldly operationalized such rules *in the face of* long-observed discrepancies between Ibn ʿArabi's ideas and the Schuonian conceptual claim for the transcendent validity of all religions. Indeed, Shah-Kazemi, like Chittick himself, never broaches the subject of Ibn ʿArabi's well-known letter to the Seljuk Sultan of Anatolia. Yet, as mentioned at the beginning of chapter 1, Ibn ʿArabi's hostility to the Christians displayed in the missive was noted early on and with not a little pique by the Catholic scholar Miguel Asín Palacios in his 1931 work on Ibn ʿArabi, *El Islam cristianizado*.[235] Moreover, Reynold A. Nicholson's study of ʿAbdal Karīm al-Jīlī's *al-Insān al-kāmil* first published in 1921 has long been regarded as an important

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[235] See chapter 1, p. 29.

early contribution to the study of Ibn ʻArabi and his school.[236] As one of Ibn ʻArabi's most important interpreters, Jīlī (d. after 1408) articulated much of the same discourse. While Nicholson admits that Jīlī criticizes Christianity, albeit "mildly and apologetically," he notes that Ibn ʻArabi "is more critical and orthodox than Jílí."[237] Still, according to Nicholson, Jīlī not only recognizes Islam as "the crown of religions,"[238] he accepts—like Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn ʻArabi—the idea of *taḥrīf* in its more extreme form, i.e., the actual corruption of the text (*taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*). Thus, Nicholson glosses Jīlī: "*It is true that the Jews and Christians suffer misery, but why is this? Because they have altered God's Word and substituted something of their own.*"[239]

Yet, even more germane to the legacy of Perennialist engagement with Ibn ʻArabi is the similar position of Ivan Aguéli (d. 1917), the Swedish painter, anarchist, esotericist, and Sufi extraordinaire who introduced Guénon and Schuon to the thought of the Andalusian Sufi. While studying at the famous al-Azhar university in Cairo, Aguéli was initiated into a branch of the Shādhiliyya by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿIllaysh,[240] who was for a time an associate of Amir ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī (d. 1883) in Damascus. Famous as the leader of the resistance against the French occupation of Algeria, ʿAbd al-Qādir "proved to be the most influential interpreter of Ibn ʿArabī in his time."[241] Thus, as Sedgwick notes, the "Traditionalist

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[236] Nicholson's analysis of Jīlī is commended by Schimmel. See Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 281.

[237] Reynold A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 139.

[238] Ibid., 138, 141.

[239] Ibid., 133 (emphasis mine).

[240] I.e., the 'Arabiyya Shādhiliyya (or Shādhiliyya 'Arabiyya); see Meir Hatina, "Where East Meets West: Sufism, Cultural Rapprochement, and Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39 (2007): 390.

[241] Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 6. It should be noted here that Perennialists often point out as evidence of his religious universalism ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī's compassionate treatment of French prisoners during the

emphasis on Ibn al-Arabi, then, derives ultimately from the Amir Abd al-Qadir."[242] After

surveying Aguéli's Arabic letters, the Swedish Islamicist H. S. Nyberg (the first Western

scholar to publish a critical edition of several important treatises by Ibn 'Arabi[243]) asserted

that Aguéli was an "expert on Muḥyi 'd-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī."[244] Not only did Aguéli have a

direct influence upon Guénon as his initiator into 'Illaysh's Sufi order, Aguéli's views on Ibn

'Arabi and Sufism were also put forth in a series of articles published in Guénon's journal *La*

Gnose under Aguéli's Muslim name 'Abdul-Hādi.[245]

    Due to his long-term interest in Theosophy and his engagement with Guénon's

French occultist milieu, much of what would come to be standard Schuonian Perennialist

doctrine can be found in Aguéli's writing such as the division between esoteric and exoteric

and the importance of initiation. Indeed, even the notion of the "Marian Initiation"

(*l'initiation marienne*) that Schuon importantly claimed for himself can be found first in

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Algerian resistance and his famous 1860 defense of Damascene Christians against a pogrom initiated by Druze leaders. However, as Weismann notes, "ʿAbd al-Qādir does not deny the duty of jihad against the opponents of Islam, *until they pay the poll tax and are humiliated*, although he describes it as the most difficult commandment for the sufis to endure." Importantly, however, his compassionate attitude towards the Christians did cause a significant spiritual rift with Ibn 'Arabi, who supposedly came to ʿAbd al-Qādir in a dream and reprimanded him for giving some of them the traditional Muslim greeting of *taslīm*. Ibid., 190 (emphasis mine). For a Perennialist treatment of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī' see Reza Shah-Kazemi, "From the Spirituality of *Jihād* to the Ideology of Jihadism," in *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition, Revised and Expanded: Essays by Western Muslim Scholars*, ed. Joseph E. B. Lumbard (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009), 130-136.

[242] Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 61, 62. See also Hülya Küçük, "A Brief History of Western Sufism," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 36, no. 2 (2008): 296.

[243] In 1919, Nyberg published a critical edition of three of Ibn 'Arabi's smaller works: *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir* (*The Book of Circles*), ʿ*Uqlat al-mustawfiz* (*The Knot of Preparedness*) and *Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya* (*The Divine Dispositions*). See H. S. Nyberg, *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-'Arabî* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1919).

[244] H. S. Nyberg cited in Paul Chacornac, *The Simple Life of René Guénon* (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 36.

[245] See Abdul-Hâdi (John Gustav Agelii, dit Ivan Aguéli), *Ecrits pour La Gnose: comprenant la traduction de l'arabe du Traité de l'Unité* (Milano: Archè, 1988). See also Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 59-60.

157

Aguéli.[246] Yet, as Meir Hatina notes, Aguéli imbued "Sufism with an orthodox hue," which "also encompassed Ibn ʿArabi himself."[247] Thus, Aguéli would call Ibn 'Arabi "the most Muslim of all Muslims"[248] and depict him as "the purest of ʿulamaʾ in adherence to the unity of Allah and the path of His Prophet."[249] Although Aguéli expounded on the similarities between Islam and Taoism, he clearly stated that he believed Islam to be the superior of the two. Even though they were both "primordial" religions, Taoism was, according to Aguéli, purely esoteric, while Islam was "esotero-exoteric" and therefore complete.[250] Other religions, however, such as Christianity and Buddhism, were qualitatively inferior since they rejected "collective reality"—social justice being an important reality for Aguéli—while "Brahmanism" was also inferior because it "is only local, at least in practical terms, while Islam is universal."[251] Indeed, Aguéli time and again praises Islam as the most integral and universal religion known to humanity. Moreover, in accordance with the assertions of Ibn 'Arabi that we have seen above, such discourse is always contextualized within a supersessionist Prophetology, as Aguéli states:

> [W]e consider the prophetic chain to be completed, *sealed*, with Muhammad, the Prophet of Arabs and non-Arabs, because he is its culmination. The prophetic spirit is the doctrine of the "Supreme Identity," the All-One in metaphysics, the Universal Man in psychology, and the Integral Humanity in social organization. It began with Adam and was completed by Muhammad.[252]

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[246] ʿAbdul-Hâdi, "Pages dédiées à Mercure," in *Ecrits pour La Gnose*, 30. Regarding Aguéli's general biography and relation to Perennialist history see Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 45, 150-51, 265.

[247] Hatina, "Where East Meets West," 396.

[248] ʿAbdul-Hâdi, "Pages dédiées à Mercure," 28.

[249] ʿAbd al-Hadi quoted in Meir Hatina, "Where East Meets West," 396, 407n47.

[250] ʿAbdul-Hâdi, "L'universalité en l'Islam," in *Ecrits pour La Gnose*, 101.

[251] Ibid., 100.

[252] Ibid., 88.

Yet, as I have argued above, it is apparent that Schuon made a Copernican turn away from such a geocentric cosmology with Muhammad as the luminous "sun" that subsumes the inferior stellar bodies of other prophets. While Guénon may have begun such a modification with his idea of a Primordial Tradition dissociated from any particular religious form, it was Schuon's conception of "the transcendent unity of religions" that made a decisive paradigm shift, subtly rejecting Aguéli's assertions above.[253]

Indeed, Schuon would later call such recourse to supersessionism "dogmatism," which although a natural manifestation of "divine subjectivity" is "limitative" and not "pure truth."[254] As such, Schuon states that "Muhammad is 'the best' inasmuch as he represents a quality of Islam by which it surpasses other religions; but every integral religion necessarily possesses such an incomparable quality, for otherwise it would not exist."[255] Schuon thus understands "the role of esoterism" as the surmounting of such "dogmatist disequilibriums," and not prolonging or refining them.[256] Indeed, this was Ibn 'Arabi's error precisely, which caused his thought to be, according to Schuon, "uneven" and "discontinuous"; i.e., while Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics was sometimes sublime, his theology was too often tied to a Semitic heteronomy and its attendant fideistic literalism.[257]

Thus, Schuon's Copernican turn was more a move away from the premodern institution of Sufism as a whole, and not Ibn 'Arabi's thought in particular. As Schuon notes:

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[253] Such a shift began with the 1948 publication of *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*. See chapter 3, p. 220.

[254] Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 92, 93.

[255] Ibid., 99.

[256] Frithjof Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence: A New Translation with Selected Letters*, trans. Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge, and James S. Cutsinger ed. James S. Cutsinger Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 33.

[257] Ibid., 65. See chapter 3, pp. 201-202.

> Our starting point is *Advaita Vedânta*, and not a voluntarist, individualist, and moralist anthropology, with which ordinary Sufism is unquestionably identified; and this is true whether or not it is to the liking of those who wish our 'orthodoxy' to consist in feigning an Arabo-Semitic mentality, or falling in love with it.[258]

While chapter 3 will explore Schuon's recourse to nineteenth century Aryan discourse and its connection to his construction of Perennialism, here it is important to point out that his above disdain for an "Arabo-Semitic" heteronomy has been smuggled back into contemporary Perennialist readings of Ibn 'Arabi, only as dissociated from Ibn 'Arabi's discourse itself. Such readings repeatedly disavow Ibn 'Arabi's connection to more heteronomous and "normative" theological principles that were typical of his juridico-religious milieu as exemplified in the discourse of Chittick and Shah-Kazemi above and their denial of Ibn 'Arabi's supersessionism, including his particularly exclusivist understandings of *naskh* and *taḥrīf*.

As such, contemporary Schuonian Perennialist discourse on Ibn 'Arabi has decoupled itself from Schuon's own ambivalence about Ibn 'Arabi and taken on a life of its own *as a discursive regime*. Thus, in a Foucauldian sense, Schuon is clearly a "founder of discursivity," i.e., an author who has produced "the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts."[259] According to Foucault, such founders of discursivity have "created a possibility for something other than their discourse, yet something belonging to what they founded."[260] Thus, the assertions of the Perennialist authors surveyed throughout this chapter evince adherence to specific discursive rules laid out in Schuon's Copernican turn away from a premodern religious geocentricism to an expanded heliocentric discourse

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[258] Letter quoted in Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon*, 46.

[259] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," in *The Essential Foucault*: *Selections from Essential Works of Foucault*, *1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: New Press, 2003), 387.

[260] Ibid.

160

on religion. In other words, Schuon's turn is marked by a move from a hierarchical religiocentrism to a multi-religious model united by the transcendent religious *a priori* of the Perennial Religion (*religio perennis*), i.e., "religion as such."

The assimilation of Ibn 'Arabi's discourse into the Schuonian universalist model seems to have been fueled, at least in part, by a Perennialist ideological mission, as detailed above by Nasr, "to preserve religious truth, traditional orthodoxy, the dogmatic theological structures of one's own religion and […] gain knowledge of other traditions *and accept them as spiritually valid ways and roads to God*." Yet, as has been evinced throughout the first part of this study, Ibn 'Arabi's discourse is marked by a very different concern for "spiritual validity"—one permeated with an heteronomous tradition of Islamic absolutism. Rather than a call to unify all contemporary religions within an underlying religious essence, Ibn 'Arabi's discourse is marked by a juridico-metaphysical supersessionism that is conspicuously exclusivist. While Ibn 'Arabi's above mentioned doctrine of *ultimate* salvation for all is certainly a radical mode of soteriological universalism, it should be recalled that the Salafī exemplar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) argued for *an even more* radical soteriology.[261] Yet, the Andalusian Sufi's *interim* position that an untold number of "disbelievers" may need suffer an abiding "therapeutic" purification in Hell for following corrupted scriptures and abrogated dispensations without the salvific remuneration of the *jizya* would seem to warrant pause for those who claim, like Almirzanah, that Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysical approach "is very essential in enhancing interfaith dialogue and acceptance of different religious perspectives."[262]

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[261] While Ibn 'Arabi was unwilling to go against the literal and normative consensus that Hell was eternal and thus held it would eventually turn "sweet," as mentioned above (p. 63), Ibn Taymiyya could not imagine God's mercy allowing eternal Hell; nor could he imagine God have any wise purpose in keeping it after its denizens had been purified. He thus held it would pass away entirely. See Jon Hoover, "Islamic Universalism: Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's Salafī Deliberations on the Duration of Hell-Fire," *The Muslim World* 99 (2009): 189.

[262] Almirzanah, *When Mystic Masters Meet*, 213.

PART TWO

GENEALOGIES AND IDEAL SUBJECTS

CHAPTER THREE

SEAL OF MARIAN SAINTHOOD:
SCHUONIAN ARYANISM AND THE DE-SEMITIZATION OF IBN 'ARABI

And when, in play, he stole their veils,
He wished to see himself in Truth's naked ray.[1]

The notions that we so willingly see as transcendental, aprioristic, or original are
almost always those that are most deeply buried in our own cultural memory.[2]

With the publication of *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (De l'Unité

transcendante des Religions) in 1948 and the death of his predecessor René Guénon in 1951,

Frithjof Schuon quickly became "the great expositor of esoterism and the *sophia perennis* of

his day […]."[3] *The Transcendent Unity* is not only Schuon's most emblematic work, but it is

often taken to be based upon the unitive teachings of Ibn 'Arabi.[4] Like its title suggests, it

claims that all religious forms are unified in their transcendent, essential nature. Yet, a

hallmark of Schuon's presentation of such "transcendent unity" is its negative framing. For

example, Schuon asserts that "it is metaphysically impossible" that any given religious form

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[1] Frithjof Schuon, *Songs without Names, Volumes I-VI* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 99.

[2] Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 196.

[3] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Frithjof Schuon and the Islamic Tradition," in *The Essential Sophia*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Katherine O'Brien (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 258; first published in the journal *Sophia* 5, no. 1 (1999).

[4] E.g., see Eric Geoffroy, *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2010), 184, 187. See also Thierry Zarcone, "Rereadings and Transformations of Sufism in the West," *Diogenes* 47, no. 187 (1999): 116.

"*should possess a unique value to the exclusion of other forms; for a form, by definition, cannot be unique and exclusive* [...]."[5] Schuon explains this point further:

> the exoteric claim to the exclusive possession of the truth comes up against the axiomatic objection that *there is no such thing in existence as a unique fact*, for the simple reason that *it is strictly impossible that such a fact should exist*, unicity alone being unique and no fact being unicity; *it is this that is ignored by the ideology of the "believers," which is fundamentally nothing but an intentional and interested confusion between the formal and the universal*.[6]

According to Schuon, it is thus only through "a doctrine *that is metaphysical* in the most precise meaning of the word," i.e., as proceeding "*exclusively from the Intellect*," that the "*intentional and interested confusion*" of normative religion is transcended and the absolute truth of "unicity" realized.[7] Thus, Schuon asserts that "*intellectual intuition is a direct and active participation in divine Knowledge and not an indirect and passive participation, as is faith*."[8]

Such valorization of metaphysical intellection takes on additional significance in a work by Schuon published nearly ten years later in 1957. In this tellingly entitled monograph *Castes and Races* (Castes et Races), Schuon asserts that "if the *white race can claim a sort of pre-eminence*, it can do so *only through the Hindu group* which in a way *perpetuates the primordial state of the Indo-Europeans* and, in a wider sense, that of *white men as a whole*."[9] Schuon further notes that such a "primordial state" of the white man is preserved by the Hindus because they "*surpass every other human group by their contemplativity and the*

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[5] Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton: Quest Books, 2005), 18 (emphasis mine).

[6] Ibid., 19 (emphasis mine).

[7] Ibid., xxix (emphasis mine).

[8] Ibid., xxx (emphasis mine).

[9] Frithjof Schuon, *Castes and Races*, trans. Marco Pallis and Macleod Matheson (Bedfont: Perennial Books Ltd., 1982), 53 (emphasis mine).

metaphysical genius resulting from this […]."[10] While the assertion of a Hindu-Indo-

European-white supremacy seems paradoxical enough given Schuon's above claims for the

metaphysical impossibility of exclusive form, it appears all the more so given the fact that

when *Castes and Races* was published, more than twenty years had past since Schuon had

taken the spiritual leadership of the first organized "traditional" European Sufi order (*ṭarīqa*)

under the Muslim name of ʿlsa Nūr al-Dīn Ahmad al-Shādhilī al-ʿAlawī.[11]

      Yet, the above primacy Schuon affords the "metaphysical genius" of "the Hindu

group" in terms of "the primordial state of the Indo-Europeans" is also reflected in his

attitude towards Sufism. In his only work specifically dedicated to the subject, *Sufism: Veil*

and Quintessence (Le Soufisme: voile et quintessence, 1980), Schuon faults "Sufi

metaphysics" for being linked to the "*anti-metaphysical and moralizing creationism of the*

monotheistic theologies," which ultimately keep it from admitting the "the principle of

relativity," i.e., the transcendent unity of religions.[12] Shortly after, Schuon asserts: "The

innermost motive of *Muslim mysticism is fundamentally more moral than intellectual* […] in

the sense that Arab or Muslim, or *Semitic*, sensibility always remains more or less volitive,

hence subjectivist […]."[13] Indeed, in the same passage Schuon unapologetically states: "We

do not believe we are over-stylizing things in taking the view that *the Aryan tends to be a*

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[10] Schuon, *Castes and Races*, 53 (emphasis mine).

[11] I.e., a branch of the Shādhiliyya-ʿAlāwiyya *ṭarīqa* founded by Ahmad al-ʿAlāwī in Mostaganem, Algeria. See Mark J. Sedgwick, "The 'Traditionalist' Shâdhiliyya in the West: Guénonians and Schuonians," in *Une voie soufie dans le monde: la Shâdhiliyya*, ed. Eric Geoffroy (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2005), 461.

[12] Frithjof Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence: A New Translation with Selected Letters*, trans. Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge, and James S. Cutsinger ed. James S. Cutsinger Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 24.

[13] Ibid., 28 (emphasis mine). Schuon uses the term "subjectivist" (*subjectiviste*) here to an attitude that he attributes to "Semitic" ontology that is subsumed with empirical feelings and denies "objective" reality. See Frithjof Schuon, *Le Soufisme: voile et quintessence* (Paris : Dervy-Livres, 1980), 38.

philosopher whereas the Semite is above all a moralist […]."[14] As evidence of such an

assertion, Schuon thus claims that one may simply "compare the *Upanishad*s, the *Yoga-*

Vasishtha, and the *Bhagavad Gītā* with the Bible, or Hindu doctrines with Talmudic

speculations."[15] It is in the face of such historically situated and ideologically weighted

comparisons, not to mention their normalization, that Perennialist constructions of Ibn ʿArabi

as the premodern foundation for Schuonian "universalism" should give us pause.

Indeed, in an essay theorizing religious discursivity in terms of "social formation,"

Russell McCutcheon importantly points out that since all social behavior is constrained by

historical context, any one perspective or point of view can never be universal. As such, "all

social formation relies on a kind of sleight of hand whereby all-inclusive systems arise from

premises that are fundamentally exclusive."[16] Although Schuon's discourse claims to

recognize the universal validity of all religions beyond the limits of exoteric exclusivity, it

consistently presents as self-evident *the metaphysical superiority* of a so-called Aryan

spiritual typology over that of the Semitic. Rather than seeking to unite the various religions,

the following chapter argues that Schuon's Perennialism is an ideological and hegemonic

discourse built upon a racialist scaffolding that strikingly echoes what Léon Poliakov

famously dubbed the nineteenth century "Aryan myth."[17] Such framing allows Schuon to

decouple Ibn ʿArabi's Sufism—which is faulted for its so-called Semitic characteristics of

moralism, dogmatism, voluntarism, inspirationism, literalism, etc.—from a "pure"

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[14] Schuon, *Sufism*, 28 (emphasis mine).

[15] Ibid., 28.

[16] Russell T. McCutcheon, *Critics not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 33.

[17] Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*, trans. Edmund Howard (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1996).

esotericism that acknowledges the relativity of exoteric religious forms. In order to accomplish this, Ibn 'Arabi's Muslim subjectivity and self-identification with Muhammad are reinscribed within an Indo-European frame through an Aryanized image of the Virgin Mary. As such, Schuon effectively de-Semitizes Ibn 'Arabi in order to legitimize his own Aryan ideal of "authentic" religion, i.e., *the religio perennis*. While demonstrating certain unacknowledged, and thus ironic, similarities to Ibn 'Arabi's normative Islamic paradigm of exclusive validity and supersessionism,[18] Schuon's racialist ideology of Aryan supremacy remains quite apart from the ideas articulated by the Andalusian Sufi.[19]

To formulate this argument, the following chapter proceeds in two parts. The first is a detailed comparative historicization of Schuon's formulations of Aryan metaphysical superiority in opposition to a Semitic Other. Here, I compare Schuon's discursive practices with that of the field of nineteenth century Aryanist discourse as famously represented by Ernest Renan (d. 1892) and his well-known contemporaries such as Christian Lassen (d. 1876), Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (d. 1882), and Houston Stewart Chamberlain (d. 1927). In comparing Schuon's discourse to that of such founders, it is not my intention to make claims of direct influence of any one author or text. Rather, I make the case for Schuon's use of *a particular set* of discursive practices developed within nineteenth century Aryanism and

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[18] As discussed in the previous chapters, Ibn 'Arabi's religious "exclusivity" (i.e., his discourse on abrogation [*naskh*] and scriptural corruption of previous revelation [*taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*]) does not include exclusive rights to salvation in its widest sense, since even Hell becomes blissful for its denizens. See chapter 1, p. 63.

[19] The difference here lies mainly between a premodern inferiorization of the religious Other based upon doctrinal terms in opposition to the modern "*inferiorization of the human beings practicing those religions* […]." See Ramón Grosfoguel and Eric Mielants, "The Long-Durée Entanglement Between Islamophobia and Racism in the Modern/Colonial Capitalist/Patriarchal World-System: An Introduction," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 5, no. 1 (2006): 4 (emphasis original).

marked by a "simplified, distorted, and prejudiced construction of opposites"[20] that ideologically frames Schuon's discourse. The second part is thus an analysis of how these discursive practices are deployed in Schuon's construction of esotericism and Ibn ʿArabi's delimited place within it.

Approaching Schuon's Aryanist Discourse

Schuon's complex construction of Perennialism is not only one of the most dominant discursive fields in the contemporary Western reception of Ibn ʿArabi and Sufism,[21] his extensive oeuvre is also held by some to rank as the most profound metaphysical legacy of the twentieth century.[22] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who is one of this past century's most celebrated thinkers and recognized in many circles as one of the foremost experts on Islam alive today,[23] has stated that Schuon was seemingly "endowed with the intellectual power to penetrate into the heart and essence of all things, and especially religious universes of form and meaning, which he has clarified in an unparalleled fashion […]."[24] Moreover, Nasr has suggested that the influence of Schuon's "works in both the West and the Islamic world is much greater than what a cursory glance would reveal and in fact only in-depth studies can

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[20] Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 109.

[21] James Winston Morris, "Ibn ʿArabi in the 'Far West,'" *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* 24 (2001): 106.

[22] William Quinn, "Schuon, Frithjof (also known as Shaykh ʿIsâ Nur al-Dîn Ahmad al-Shâdhilî al-Darqâwî al-ʿAlawî al-Maryamî)," *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1043.

[23] As Huston Smith recently notes, Nasr is the only scholar ever to have the dual honor of inclusion in the Library of Living Philosophers (*The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 2001) and the honor of offering the Gifford Lectures in Glasgow, Scotland (published as *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 1981), heralded by Smith as "one of the most important books of the twentieth century." Huston Smith, foreword to *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007), vii.

[24] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 97.

make known the profundity and extent of his influence."[25] While there has been no shortage

of hagiographical treatments of Schuon, the general lack of critical scholarship on his work

bespeaks of the widespread indifference with which he has been received in academia.[26] The

few recent exceptions that do offer sustained critical analyses highlight the scandal that

surrounded the elderly Schuon and his spiritual community in Bloomington, Indiana.[27] Yet,

by focusing on the dramas around his "personal cult," such treatments have neglected to

historicize Schuon's discursive practices in fields outside of their immediate orbit. Without

such historicization, however, Schuon's discourse, and the ideas that it has generated, remain

somewhat veiled and as such "transcendently" removed from the larger context of religion-

making in the West and its attendant constructions of religious universalism.

 While Schuon's above recourse to the primacy of Hinduism as a metaphysical

tradition closely follows the assertions of his predecessor Guénon[28] and those who followed

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[25] Nasr, "Frithjof Schuon," 268. As noted in the previous chapter, Mark Sedgwick has recently pointed out that since 1950 there has been a ubiquitous presence of Schuonian Perennialism within Western publishing houses. See chapter 2, p. 104n52.

[26] Indeed, the vast majority of the work written about Schuon, with only a few important exceptions (see following note), is hagiographical. The reason for this, I think, is rather straightforward. There seem to be two camps of scholars who are familiar with Schuon's work: those who adhere to a version of his Perennialism (or Guénonian Traditionalism), or are at least sympathetic to it, and those who think his esotericism lies completely outside of the domain of academic scholarship and therefore believe it to hold little or no significance. Recent hagiographical treatments of his "life and works" include Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude, *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); Harry Oldmeadow, *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2010); and Michael Oren Fitzgerald, *Frithjof Schuon: Messenger of the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2010).

[27] Most notably Hugh Urban, "A Dance of Masks: The Esoteric Ethics of Frithjof Schuon," in *Crossing Boundaries: Essays on the Ethical Status of Mysticism*, ed. G. William Barnard and Jeffrey J. Kripal (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2002), 406-440; Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*. Setareh Houman's recent study should also be mentioned here for its constrained critique, although it is primarily a sympathetic, intellectual history of Schuon's life and work in relation to the broader genealogy of American Perennialism; see Setareh Houman, *De la philosophia perennis au pérennialisme américain* (Milan: Archè, 2010). In 1991 charges of sexual improprieties with three teenage girls allegedly forced to participate in nude ritual dances were brought against Schuon who was then 84. These charges were eventually dropped for reasons that are not entirely clear. See Urban, "A Dance of Masks," 407.

[28] Guénon claimed that the *Sanātana Dharma* was the only "fully integral" tradition. See René Guénon, *Studies in Hinduism*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 81-82. In an article

him, it is clear that Schuon's self-professed "Aryanism"[29] is the result of a broader array of

discursive influences.[30] Indeed, the same holds true for the *fin de siècle* French occultism

from which modern Perennialism sprang, such as the esotericism of the Theosophical

Society.[31]

In important ways, Schuon's Aryanist discourse displays closer parallels with older

discursive practices evinced in the development of the nineteenth century Aryanism of Renan

and his contemporaries. The discursive genealogy of this particular racialist discourse can be

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originally published in 1985, Schuon states that "Guénon was entirely right in specifying that *Vedānta* is the most direct and, in a certain respect, the most assimilable expression of pure metaphysics; no attachment to any non-Hindu tradition obliges us not to know this, or to pretend not to know it." Frithjof Schuon, "René Guénon: a note," in *René Guénon: Some Observations*, ed. William Stoddart (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 8; originally published in *René Guénon*, ed. Jean-Pierre Laurant (Paris: Les Editions de l'Herne, 1985).

[29] Schuon professed his "Aryanism" in several letters to disciples. See pp. 210, 213 and 213n249 below.

[30] Although like Schuon, Guénon defended the Indian caste system in spirituo-racial terms, he prefers to speak of the *Sanātana Dharma* or "Hindu tradition" rather than that of Aryanism or the Aryan spirit. Both Guénon and his contemporary Traditionalist Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (d. 1947) largely refrained from employing the Aryan/Semite binary in racialist terms. For Guénon's criticisms of "Aryan race" see: René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, trans. Marco Pallis (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 51, 123; and René Guénon, *Symbols of Sacred Science*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 65n12. While in his pre-Traditionalist scholarly work on India, Coomaraswamy uses the term "Aryan" to denote the northern Indo-Aryan linguistic "race" in opposition to the southern "Dravidian," the term becomes notably absent in his later work. For an example of Coomaraswamy's pre-Traditionalist use of "Aryan" see Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1965), 5. While Guénon's Italian collaborator, the right-wing political philosopher and esotericist Julius Evola (d. 1974) liberally employed Aryanist racialist terminology, predominantly in works written before the fall of the Third Reich, his *warrior-activist* appropriation of Guénonian Traditionalism, which replaced metaphysical *gnosis* with "pure power," distinguishes his Aryanist cosmology from Schuon's in critical respects. See Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1995), 68, 21ff. See also Paul Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 21, 27, 41, 85.

[31] As Sedgwick observes, one of the most important precursors to Guénonian Traditionalism—and thus later Schuonian Perennialism—was the "Vedanta-Perennialism" of the Theosophical Society. See Mark J. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 40. Although the language and ideas of Theosophy are shot through with the racialist conceptions of its nineteenth century milieu, H. P. Blavatsky's narrative of "anthropogenesis" and her particular conception of the Aryan race was quite a departure from the standard academic Aryanism of her day. Indeed, Blavatsky specifically distinguished herself from "Max Müller and the other *Aryanists*." See H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, vol. 2 (1888; reprint, Los Angeles: The Theosophy Co., 1947), 425. See also Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 244.

traced to the nascent nationalism of German Romanticism and its ethnocentric identification with ancient India that readily conflated language and race.[32] As mentioned in chapter 2, as a young boy Schuon was exposed to German Romantic literature and Orientalist works, and it is clear that such literature had an enduring influence upon his intellectual identity. Indeed, in an unpublished letter to a disciple, Schuon positions himself as a "South German deeply rooted in poetic and mystical romanticism—having grown up with the German fairy-tale and German song [...]."[33] While Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude note that the young Schuon read "Goethe and Schiller, then later Heine,"[34] a more detailed discursive genealogy of the German Romanticism—and possibly a neo-Romantic Volkisch mysticism[35]—that may have influenced Schuon's Aryanism is open to speculation.

That Schuon was familiar with the racialist discourse of nineteenth century Aryanism is clear since he mentions Gobineau and Chamberlain by name in one of his later works. Referring to them as "certain racists," he specifically takes Gobineau and Chamberlain to task for being unaware of the fact that racial patterning or "each race repetition of certain types" is due not simply "to mixtures" of bloodline, but to the repetition of "typological

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[32] See Douglas T. McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism: Ancient India's Rebirth in Modern Germany* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, c2009), 70-72. See also Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, 190-91; and J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: the Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997), 65.

[33] Frithjof Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters of the Shaykh," December 1980 (photocopy, unpublished Maryamiyya papers), 2.

[34] Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon*, 7.

[35] As George Mosse notes, late nineteenth century Volkisch mysticism, or the "New Romanticism," developed from German romanticism as a response to the alienation of modern society. Volkisch ideology took on racial dimensions in opposition to the Jews who were blamed for industrialization. The Jewish ethos was thus understood to derive "from a static center, the law, and then diffused outward," while the Volk were receptive to a "cosmic feeling" that "penetrated *inward* to the center [...]." In this Volkisch caricature, the "sterile law" by which the Jews lived "suffocated their inner spirituality." George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap,1964), 57-58. See also Roderick Stackelberg, "*Völkisch* Movement and Ideology," in *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, ed. Richard S. Levy (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 743-745.

possibilities" consisting of "astrological types, the universality of the temperaments, and other factors [...]."[36] Yet, in the same work, Schuon notes:

> If the *mixture between races* too different from each other is to be avoided, it is precisely because this disparity generally has a consequence that the individual possesses two centers, which means practically speaking that he has none; in other words that he has no identity.[37]

By this convenient, if not ironic, example, it is clear that Schuon did not find the category of race problematic *in and of itself*. Yet, more importantly, it further shows that Schuon understood biological race itself to be imbricated with spiritual identity, i.e., as "center," in some important way. Indeed, in his above mentioned work *Castes and Races*, Schuon affirms the category of "race" beyond simply physiology as infused with higher spiritual significance:

> *It is not possible* [...] *to hold that race is something devoid of meaning apart from physical characteristics*, for, if it be true that formal constraints have nothing absolute about them, forms must none the less have their own sufficient reason; *if races are not castes, they must all the same correspond to human differences of another order, rather as differences of style may express equivalence in the spiritual order whilst also marking divergencies of mode*.[38]

Yet, Schuon's articulation of race as expressing differences "in the spiritual order" is not unique to him. As will be discussed below, the eighteenth century "discovery" of the common origin of the Indo-European, i.e., "Aryan," languages—and the subsequent rise of comparative philology as a "scientific" discipline in the nineteenth century—opened the way for European scholars to posit theoretical connections between language, religion, and race.[39] The essential natures of languages were judged by the sophistication of their grammatical structures, which as Tomoko Masuzawa has recently emphasized, were *metaphysically*

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[36] Frithjof Schuon, *To Have a Center* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1990), 46. Originally published as *Avoir un centre*, 1988.

[37] Schuon, *To Have a Center*, 7.

[38] Schuon, *Castes and Races*, 37 (emphasis mine).

[39] See Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 173.

interpreted rather than historically documented.[40] Thus, grammatical inflection was "construed as a syntactical structure resulting naturally and directly from the innermost spiritual urge of a people (*Volk*), and as such it was said to *attest to the creativity and the spirit of freedom intrinsic to the disposition of those who originated this linguistic form*."[41]

While the Semitic languages were understood to be limited in their inflectional capability, thus evincing an essential "rigidity" in the Semitic "mentality," the perfect inflection of the Aryan languages revealed an unconstrained intellectual and spiritual sophistication.[42] Thus, as Colin Kidd observes, "nineteenth-century anthropologists began to explain religious phenomena as manifestations of racial mentalities."[43] In such treatments, "[r]ace was not simply a matter of external physical differences but of deep psychic differences, which manifested themselves in the varieties of religion found throughout the world."[44]

Indeed, both Gobineau and Chamberlain—the very two authors that Schuon castigates above as focusing solely on physiology—were also engaged in spiritual constructions of race since "[t]heir discussion of the great Teutonic race was shot through with talk of German blood that mystically bound all Teutons together with a racial soul."[45]

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[40] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 24.

[41] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[42] Ibid., 163-169.

[43] Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 171.

[44] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[45] John P. Jackson Jr. and Nadine M. Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO Inc., 2004), 107.

As such, John P. Jackson Jr. and Nadine M. Weidman note that they were "in some significant sense, 'racial mystics.'"[46]

Schuon's idea of race, like his Aryanist predecessors, seems to have vacillated between categorizations of language, psychology, physiology, and spirituality. While Schuon, as will be shown below, followed Gobineau's famous tripartite division of race as "the white, the yellow, and the black,"[47] his ideas regarding the Aryan and Semitic typologies fluctuated. In one passage, Schuon notes: "Like the Semites, the Aryans constitute above all *a linguistic group, which implies that they also constitute, though more vaguely, a psychological group and even a racial group, at least originally* […]."[48] Elsewhere, however, Schuon ostensibly denies Aryan and Semite as legitimate racial categories, "even though," he notes, "there may be racial predominances in these linguistic groups, and even though each language corresponds to a greater or lesser extent to what *may be called a 'psychological race.'*"[49]

Unlike Max Müller, who "insisted that language and race were not equivalent,"[50] the above examples evince Schuon's blending of these two categories. Yet, as will be discussed in more detail below, such conflation can be traced back to the nascent nationalism of German Romanticism and Friedrich Schlegel's (d. 1829) ethnocentric identification with

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[46] Ibid.

[47] See Arthur comte de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), 205-207.

[48] Schuon, *Sufism*, 20.

[49] Schuon, *To Have a Center*, 45 (emphasis mine).

[50] Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 186.

ancient India.[51] Indeed, during the nineteenth century, as Kidd notes, "[t]he intellectual

borders between philology and race were porous."[52]

While chapter 2 analyzed how Ibn 'Arabi has been constructed within the field of

translation aligned with Schuonian Perennialism, this chapter explores Schuon's own

construction of Ibn 'Arabi in relation to the Aryanist discursive practices of his original

discourse. The ubiquity of such practices throughout Schuon's works and their discursive and

epistemological effects remain largely uninterrogated. Although I refrain from speculating on

Schuon's political alliances in his use of Aryanist discourse,[53] I do analyze the function of

such discourse in terms of his understanding of Ibn 'Arabi within an ideological

framework.[54] Here, I follow McCutcheon in defining ideology as a universalizing and

homogenizing discourse deployed to authorize "representations whose trace, history, or

context is obscured (whether intentionally or not)."[55]

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[51] As Poliakov notes, it was Friedrich Schlegel (d. 1829) who first gave the discipline of comparative philology "an anthropological twist by deducing from the relationship of language a relationship of race." Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, 190. See also McGetchin, *Indology*, 70-72; and J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: the Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997), 65.

[52] Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 186.

[53] This chapter approaches Schuon's Aryanist discursivity from within a Foucauldian methodology by seeking to deprivilege Schuon as "author." As James Clifford puts it, discourse analysis "is not interested in what [authors] have to say or feel as subjects but is concerned merely with statements as related to other statements in a field." James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 270. See also Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," in *The Essential Foucault*: *Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: New Press, 2003), 390.

[54] This is not to deny the historical reality of the Aryanist terminology that Schuon deployed post-World War II. As Maurice Olender notes, "The plain truth of the matter is that, in the heart of Europe in the middle of the twentieth century, the words Aryan and Semite became labels of life and death for millions of men, women, and children classed as one or the other." Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Aryans and Semites, a Match Made in Heaven*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Other Press 2002), 19.

[55] Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 29-30.

While "politics," as Terry Eagleton further clarifies, "refers to the power processes by which social orders are sustained or challenged, […] ideology denotes the ways in which these power processes get caught up in the realm of signification."[56] In this sense, the attempt to decouple Ibn ʿArabi's so-called "Semitic mentality" of religious formalism from an essential "Aryan" formlessness is an ideological framing within two imbricated political processes. While the first has to do with Schuon's discursive construction of esotericism as the only means to truth and the related image of his *ṭarīqa* as a "vehicle" for that truth, the second reflects the broader socio-political context of Western secular-liberalism and a post-Enlightenment essentialization of "religion" as separate from juridico-politics. In both contexts, the extent to which Ibn ʿArabi is shown to transcend his Semitism, is the extent to which he is considered to be an enlightened representative of his tradition and a universal purveyor of "authentic" religion. Such a construction of Ibn ʿArabi is reflective of an ideological project that conceals a structured schema of exclusion within a discourse that claims to be universal and pluralist. While this chapter confines its exploration to the first internal context of Schuonian ideological formation, the final chapter will look at the second socio-political context more broadly in terms of how Kantian constructions of Ibn ʿArabi and Sufism have been employed in the contemporary West in similar ways to create Muslim religious subjectivities deemed conducive to secular-liberal notions of authentic religion.

The 19th Century Aryan Myth and Schuonian Discursivity

Although the modern "scientific" discipline of comparative philology was virtually inaugurated by the English Orientalist William Jones (d. 1794), whose study of Sanskrit

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[56] Eagleton adds, however, that "since politics has its own sort of signification," it is perhaps more accurate to suggest that "ideology concerns less signification than conflicts within the field of signification." Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), 11.

prompted him to famously declare the common origins of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Gothic and Celtic,[57] its most powerful theory locating India as the common origin of humanity was enthusiastically taken up by the German Romantic philosophers.[58] As Poliakov notes, it was Schlegel who first "gave it an anthropological twist by deducing from the relationship of language a relationship of race."[59] This new Indo-European anthropology was quickly appropriated by anti-Semitic discourses, bolstered as it were by Jewish emancipation. While European Jewry aspired to be citizens, a "scientific" discourse was constructed to counter such aspirations and "the 'deicide caste' of the Jews was transformed in the aftermath of emancipation into an 'inferior race.'"[60] In this nascent discourse, Jews came "*to be seen as slavishly bound to external Law and tradition, ritualistic and irrational, and incapable of the maturity and autonomy called for in the development of enlightened, modern subjectivity* […]."[61]

While romantic arguments asserting the superior Indian capacity for philosophy are to be found as early as Schlegel's 1808 *Essay on the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*,[62] corresponding negative affirmations denigrating "Semitic mentality" arose in various

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[57] See Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, 190.

[58] As Léon Poliakov notes, it was "Herder above all who introduced the passion for India into the Germanic lands and who prompted the imagination of the Romantics to seek affiliation with Mother India." Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, 186. Besides Herder, Raymond Schwab includes the following list of important early German Indophile philosophers: Schelling, Fichte, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Schleiermacher, and Schlegel. Raymond Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 53.

[59] Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, 190.

[60] Ibid., 194.

[61] Aamir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 38 (emphasis mine).

[62] Here, Schlegel notes how the ancient language of Sanskrit was particularly well suited for the articulation of philosophical concepts. Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, 191.

German authors soon after, particularly in Schlegel's successor, the German Indologist Christian Lassen. For Lassen, the worldview of the Semite "*is subjective and egotistical.*"[63] According to Lassen, such extreme subjectivity and egotism had made Semitic religiosity intolerant and exclusivist, thus resulting in the Semitic claim to posses the only truth.[64] Indeed, Lassen held that Semitic nature is so overcome with passion and emotion that the Semite cannot appreciate the higher and refined arts such as sculpture or painting like the Indo-German.[65] Similarly, Lassen considered the Semitic mentality to be incapable of philosophical thought, since "[t]heir views and notions so absorb their intelligence that *they are unable to rise with serenity to the contemplation of pure ideas* […]."[66]

In France, Gobineau, building on the work of Lassen,[67] would further cement the relationship between philosophy and Aryan superiority through refining the connection between language and race.[68] In *The Inequality of Human Races*, Gobineau thus notes that "the language of a race is closely bound up with its intelligence and has the power of reflecting its various mental stages as they are reached. […] *Where the mental development of a race is faulty or imperfect, the language suffers to the same extent.*"[69] Thus, Gobineau continues:

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[63] Christian Lassen quoted in Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 94 (emphasis mine).

[64] Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 94.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Christian Lassen quoted in Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, 197 (emphasis mine).

[67] See Dorothy Matilda Figueira, *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 70.

[68] *Pace* Tzvetan Todorov, who locates Renan as the first to really establish "Aryan" and "Semite" as races in place of language families. Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 144.

[69] Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, 188.

The *superabundance of philosophical and ethnological terms* in Sanscrit corresponds to the genius of those who spoke it as well as its richness and rhythmic beauty. *The same is the case with Greek while the lack of precision in the Semitic tongues is exactly paralleled by the character of the Semitic peoples.*[70]

Renan, who was also indebted to Lassen,[71] further developed Gobineau's idea, asserting the existence of "linguistic races."[72] Thus, for Renan, language was "for any one race the very form and fashion of thought […]."[73] Indeed, "*language took almost entirely the place of race in the division of humanity into groups*; or, to put it in another way, the word 'race' assumed a different meaning. *Language, religion, laws, and customs, came to constitute the race far more than blood*."[74] Indeed, it was through such claims of an inherent linkage between language and race that Renan could famously reassert the superiority of the Aryan intellect:

> [T]he languages of the Aryans and the Semites differed essentially […]. The Aryan language was immensely superior […]. This marvellous instrument […] *contained in the germ all the metaphysics* which were afterwards to be developed through the Hindoo genius, the Greek genius, the German genius.[75]

For Renan it was indeed the particular "genius" of the Aryan spirit that allowed their race to become "masters of the planet"—theirs was a "courageous and philosophical […] *search for the truth*," while the downfall of the "*Semitic spirit*" was precisely its "*fearful shallowness* […] *narrowing the human mind and closing it to all subtle ideas* […]."[76] Moreover,

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[70] Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, 189.

[71] As Stefan Arvidsson recently notes, Renan's conception of the "Semitic spirit" was perhaps most indebted to Lassen's ideas. See Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 93f.

[72] Ernest Renan, *Mélanges religieux et historiques* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1904), 242.

[73] Ernest Renan, *History of the People of Israel: Till the Time of King David*, trans. C. B. Pitman and D. Bingam, vol. 1 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1905), 3.

[74] Ibid., 3 (emphasis mine).

[75] Ibid., 7-8 (emphasis mine).

[76] Ernest Renan cited in Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, 208 (emphasis mine).

according to Renan, the Semitic languages were unable to "express the mythological and epic conceptions of the Aryan peoples […]," which were thus "transformed under Semite treatment into dull historical narratives."[77] Thus, according to Renan:

> The same trait of character that prohibited the Semites great mythology, *prohibited them metaphysics*, that is to say, research of laws and principles of the world […]. [I]t could be shown that *whenever metaphysical speculation has developed in the bosom of the Semitic religions, it has been surreptitiously through the influence of the Indo-European race and an exemption from the requirements of strict orthodoxy*.[78]

In *Sufism*, Schuon follows the Renanian redefinition of race into that of language groups. As was quoted above, Schuon notes that the Semites and Aryans constitute not only a "linguistic group," but also "though more vaguely, *a psychological group and even a racial group*."[79] Schuon thus strikingly echoes Renan's contentions of a superior Aryan spirit in the quest for "truth" in opposition to the Semitic spirit that veils it. "It is perhaps not too hazardous to say," Schuon ventures, "that *the Aryan spirit* […] *tends a priori to unveil the truth* whereas *the Semitic spirit*, whose realism *is more moral than intellectual*, tends toward the veiling of the divine Majesty and those of its secrets that are too dazzling or intoxicating […]."[80] Elsewhere, Schuon echoes Renan's above contention that any notion of metaphysics in a Semitic context is only possible through an appropriation of Aryan thought *and a departure from Semitic formalism*. Thus, Schuon asserts that Martin Luther was both "fundamentally German" (i.e., Aryan) and "Semitic in spirit": "fundamentally German, *he loved what is sincere and inward, not clever and formalistic*; Semitic in spirit, *he admitted*

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[77] Renan, *History of the People of Israel*, 41.

[78] Ernest Renan, *Nouvelles considérations sur le caractère général des peuples sémitiques: et en particulier sur leur tendance au monothéisme*, vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimtre impériale, 1859), 87.

[79] Schuon, *Sufism*, 20 (emphasis mine).

[80] Ibid., 26.

only Revelation and faith and did not wish to hear of Aristotle or the Scholastics."[81]

The Renanian assertion that true metaphysics belonged solely to the "genius" of the Aryan race as diametrically opposed to Semitic revelatory "formalism" was further refined and popularized by the British born Germanophile Houston Stewart Chamberlain, a self-described "prophet" of Aryanism in Germany and beyond.[82] Thus, Chamberlain notes that the Aryan "can stand as an example of the extreme contrast to the Semite […]."[83] According to Chamberlain, the Semite, in contrast was mired in mundane matters of revelation and "*blind faith*" as opposed to "*inner experience*," "*the contemplation of nature*," and "*the power of the imagination*."[84] Indeed, "religion" for the Aryan, as opposed to that of the Semite, "*has primarily nothing to do either with superstition or with morals*; it is a state of mind." This so-called Aryan "state of mind," its "instinct," according to Chamberlain, is thus "to seek the core of nature in the heart."[85]

Similarly, Schuon's writings are saturated with the stereotypical dichotomy between *Semitic faith* and *Aryan intellect*. For example, Schuon asserts that while there are many things that can be said about the relations between "intelligence and fervor," he chooses to

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[81] Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam: Perspectives on Esoteric Ecumenism*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2008), 33 (emphasis mine).

[82] Chamberlain's 1899 work *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts) achieved international acclaim and became "the Bible" of racial truth for the Volkisch movement in Germany. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, 97. It also served as an important intellectual and ideological precursor for the theorists of the Third Reich. E.g., Alfred Rosenberg's *Foundations of the Twentieth Century*. See Jackson and Weidman, *Race*, 124. See also Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, 318-20.

[83] Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Lees, vol. 1 (New York: Howard Fertig, 1968), 434.

[84] Ibid., 432-3 (emphasis mine).

[85] Ibid., 216.

note that "the Semites have excelled in the latter, and the Aryans in the former […]."[86]

Indeed, as noted above, Schuon often asserts in concordance with his Aryanist predecessors that Aryans "*are above all metaphysicians*," while Semites are "*a priori* […] moralists."[87] Similarly, Schuon states that

> the Aryan, to the extent *he is an observer and a philosopher*, has a tendency to describe things as they are, whereas the Semite, *who is a moralist*, readily presents them as they ought to be according to his pious sentiment; he transcends them by sublimizing them *before having had time to extract the arguments comprised in their nature*.[88]

Indeed, for Schuon, like Chamberlain, the Aryan understands "the nature of things,"[89] while the Semite can only see things through the subjective filter of his dogmatic and legalistic religiosity. Notably echoing Chamberlain's assertion that Judaism banished "*everything but faith and obedience*,"[90] Schuon states "[f]or the Semite, everything begins with Revelation and therefore with faith and submission; man is *a priori* a believer and consequently a servant: <u>intelligence itself takes on the color of obedience</u>."[91]

The conceit that the Semite's entire intellectual process was dictated by revelation and law was a recurrent trope in Aryanist discourse. On one hand, this made the imagination of the Semite extremely "poor," as Chamberlain notes:

> All who have any claim at all to speak, testify unanimously that lack—or let us say poverty— of imagination is a fundamental trait of the Semite. […] Mohammedanism and Judaism are

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[86] Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, trans. Gustavo Polit (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1986), 133.

[87] Schuon, *Sufism*, 21.

[88] Ibid., 59.

[89] Elsewhere, Schuon states that "the Platonic or 'Aryan' argument is *the nature of things* […]." Frithjof Schuon, *The Fullness of God: Frithjof Schuon on Christianity*, trans. Mark Perry, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004), 72 (emphasis mine).

[90] Chamberlain, *Foundations*, vol. 1, 431 (emphasis mine).

[91] Schuon, *Sufism*, 21 (underline mine).

sufficient proofs; what we hear of the Bedouins shows us only the beginning of this poverty. As Renan happily remarks: "*le sémite a l'imagination comprimante*," that is, his imagination narrows, limits, confines; a great thought, a deeply symbolical image returns from his brain small and thin, "flattened," robbed of its far-reaching significance.[92]

Yet, such assertions regarding the stilted Semitic imagination have been historically counterbalanced, albeit in still negative terms, by a common trope disparaging the "inflamed imagination" of the Semite.[93] Somewhat remarkably, Schuon succeeds in deploying both of these stereotypes concurrently:

> Jews and Arabs have in common an overactive imagination *even when it is poor*, which quite paradoxically is not a contradiction. Many Islamic or more particularly Sufic speculations— without forgetting the Shiite sector—fully rival those rabbinical speculations that are most subject to caution […].[94]

Since it is "nourished by the treasures of Revelation," Schuon grants that "the Semitic monotheistic perspective" has the "right intention," but nevertheless "it can happen that a *quasi-stereotypical zeal takes precedence over logic* […]."[95] According to Schuon, because of its dependency on revelation, "the mind of the Semite" is characterized by "a tendency to inspiration," and thus "*the Real is enclosed in a dogma*." "In the case of the Aryan," however, "it is a tendency to intellection that seems to predominate," and here "*the emphasis is placed on a metaphysical description of the Real* and its gradations."[96]

While nineteenth century Aryanist discourse tended to denigrate the Semitic

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[92] Chamberlain, *Foundations*, vol. 1, 418.

[93] As David Theo Goldberg notes, "By the late Enlightenment racial hierarchization of national character, Immanuel Kant could wedge 'the Arab,' 'possessed of an inflamed imagination,' between the basest of (Southern) Europeans and the Far East, but significantly above 'the Negroes of Africa.'" David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 163.

[94] Schuon, *Sufism*, 25 (emphasis mine).

[95] Ibid., 61.

[96] Frithjof Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence: A New Translation with Selected Letters*, trans. Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge, and James S. Cutsinger, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009), 128 (emphasis mine).

scriptural tradition as moralistic and dogmatic, there was a concurrent propensity in the same

discourse to reductively associate Hinduism with mysticism and its more metaphysically

oriented textual tradition, i.e., the *Upanishads* or Vedanta, the ultimate teaching of the

Veda.[97] Indeed, Gobineau's, Renan's, and Chamberlain's conception of Aryanism developed

in no small part from German Romantic ideas of the metaphysical superiority of Aryan

Hinduism as expressed in the Vedanta. As mentioned above, a key German influence for all

three authors in this respect was the work of the Indologist Christian Lassen, whose

conception of Aryan philosophical supremacy over that of the Semite linked the highest

mode of Aryanism with the *whitest* castes of India.[98] Indeed, Chamberlain affectionately calls

Lassen "the great Orientalist" and notes in the first volume of *Foundations of the Nineteenth*

Century that his *Indian Archeology* (Indische Altertumskunde, 1847) "proves in detail his

view that the Indo-European race is 'more highly and more fully gifted,' that in it alone there

is 'perfect symmetry of all mental powers.'"[99] Elsewhere in the same work, Chamberlain

asserts that "[t]he Aryan Indian […] *unquestionably possesses the greatest talent for*

metaphysics of any people that ever lived […],"[100] and that the thought of "the Hindoo" is

"*metaphysically the deepest in the world*."[101] In the second volume, Chamberlain further

notes, "The most perfect expression of *absolutely mystical religion* is found among the Aryan

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[97] This was in large part due to the popularity of Anquetil-Duperron's Latin translation of the *Oupnek'hat* (sections of the *Upanisads* taken from Dara-Shukoh's Persian translation) at the turn of the nineteenth century. See Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 2002), 119-20. In European Romantic usage, "Vedanta" became synonymous with *Advaita Vedānta,* the non-dualistic philosophy developed and popularized by the Indian philosopher Shankara (d. 820). Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, 56, 229 n3.

[98] Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, 197.

[99] Chamberlain, *Foundations*, vol. 1, 338 n†.

[100] Ibid., 6.

[101] Ibid., 435 (emphasis mine).

Indians […]."[102] Of course, Chamberlain makes a direct association between such "absolute"

religion and the Germanic branch of the Aryan race: "Indian religion is genuinely Indo-

Teutonic […]."[103] Chamberlain thus claims:

> The real High School of freedom from hieratic and historical shackles is mysticism, the *philosophia teutonica* as it was called. A mystical philosophy, when completely worked out, dissolves one dogmatic theory after another as allegory; what remains is pure symbol, for religion is then no longer a creed, a hope, a conviction, but an experience of life […].[104]

Schuon also tellingly associates his *philosophia perennis* with the dissolution of

dogmatic division as essentialized and symbolic "religion" and, as such, Vedanta. In a brief

article entitled "The Perennial Philosophy," Schuon notes that

> [t]he term *philosophia perennis*, which has been current since the time of the Renaissance and of which neo-scholasticism made much use, signifies the totality of the primordial and universal truths—and therefore of the metaphysical axioms […].[105]

Further noting, however, that he prefers "the term *sophia* to that of *philosophia*," since the

latter has "completely profane" associations, Schuon continues to forcefully echo

Chamberlain above:

> The most direct doctrinal expression of the *sophia perennis* is undoubtedly *Advaita Vedānta*, with its notions of *Ātmā*, of *Māyā*, and of *Tat tvam asi*; but this doctrine is also found, in one form or another, even if only sporadically in some cases, in the sapiential esoterisms of all the great religions, and this must necessarily be so in that every normal—and thus intrinsically orthodox—religion is itself an indirect and symbolic expression of the eternal *sophia*.[106]

Thus, Schuon's *sophia perennis*, like Chamberlain's *philosophia teutonica* above, aligns true

religion with "pure symbol" and the absolute itself as "*Ātmā*" or "the eternal *sophia*."

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[102] Chamberlain, *Foundations*, vol. 2, 411.

[103] Ibid., 411.

[104] Ibid., 411 (underline mine).

[105] Frithjof Schuon, "The Perennial Philosophy," in *The Underlying Religion: An Introduction to the Perennial Philosophy*, ed. Martin Lings and Clinton Minnaar (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007), 243 (underline mine).

[106] Ibid., 244.

While Schuon maintains that "Revelation imposes itself upon Aryans and Semites alike,"[107] he also notes that the Indian "*Veda*" is a superior scriptural form that "awakens" "the intelligence" "and reminds it of what it is" instead of "enslaving it" by fiat like the Semitic revelations.[108] For the Aryan, according to Schuon, "[i]ntellectual certainty has priority here *over a submissive faith*."[109] Yet, this Aryan "*tendency to intellection*" is not only determined externally by the epistemological nature of the Vedic scriptural tradition, since in Schuon's understanding, as cited in chapter 2, "what determines the difference among forms of Truth *is the difference among human receptacles*."[110] While I return to this important aspect of Schuon's esoteric cosmology below, here it is sufficient to note that, according to Schuon, the different "mental conditions" of each racial "group"[111] self-determine the "refraction" of Truth of their particular revelation. Indeed, in *Castes and Races*, Schuon directly states: "*a revelation always conforms to a racial genius*, though this by no means signifies that it is restricted to the specific limits of the race in question."[112] Thus, "diverse Revelations do not really contradict one another since they do not apply to the same receptacle […]; *a contradiction can arise only between things situated on the same level*."[113] For Schuon, the superior quality of Aryan intellection is not simply *a result* of its distinctive

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[107] Schuon, *Sufism*, 27.

[108] Ibid., 21.

[109] Ibid., 21 (emphasis mine).

[110] Frithjof Schuon, *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, ed. James S. Cutsinger, trans. Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge, and James Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 17 (emphasis mine).

[111] Schuon makes the qualification that the division of humanity into different "branches" is "is not *always* a question of race" precisely because Schuon follows the Renanian notion of "linguistic races" and thus "human groups." Ernest Renan, *Mélanges religieux et historiques* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1904), 242.

[112] Schuon, *Castes and Races*, 42n30 (emphasis mine).

[113] Schuon, *Gnosis*, 17 (emphasis mine).

revelation, i.e., the "Veda," but the mark of a particular spirituo-racial disposition that is in itself *the cause* of its own revelation. Thus, while both Aryan "intellectionism" and Semitic "inspirationism" are "sacred," inspirationism is, according to Schuon, "derived from a particular grace and not, *like intellection, from a permanent and 'naturally supernatural' capacity*."[114]

It is indeed this same Aryan "capacity" for intellection that Chamberlain's discourse proclaims, noting that for the Teutons, "[i]t is not the amount of their knowledge that deserves admiration—for all knowledge constantly remains relative—but the fact that *they possessed the rare capacity to acquire it* […]."[115] "Only remarkable philosophical gifts," Chamberlain further notes, "can render the consumption, digestion, and utilization of so much knowledge possible."[116] Thus, unlike the poor "religious instinct" of "all the branches of the Semitic stem,"[117] the religious Aryan, according to Chamberlain, "*is in direct contact with a world beyond reason, he is thinker and poet* […]."[118]

Indeed, in *Castes and Races* Schuon echoes Chamberlain's assertion precisely, but in terms of the white race as a whole. Following Gobineau's tripartite racial typology, Schuon notes:

> Perhaps it might also be said that *the white man is essentially a poet*; […] As for the black man, he is neither a cerebral type nor a visualizer but vital, and so a born dancer; he is profoundly vital as the yellow man is delicately visual, *both races being existential rather than mental as compared to the white race*.[119]

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[114] Schuon, *Sufism*, 28.

[115] Chamberlain, *Foundations*, vol. 2, 263.

[116] Ibid., 264.

[117] Chamberlain, *Foundations*, vol. 1, 214.

[118] Ibid., 215.

[119] Schuon, *Castes and Races*, 43.

Indeed, as was quoted at the start of this chapter, it is in the same work that Schuon claims the "pre-eminence" of the white race "through the Hindu group," which by its "metaphysical genius" perpetuates the primordial reality of the Aryan.[120]

The Schuonian Aryanization of Christianity and Semitization of Islam

Even though Renan and his contemporaries deprecated the Semitic race for its parochial and intolerant insularism, they did recognize in Judaism an important function: the bequeathal of universal religion to the world. Here, Judaism took on "the custodial status of foster parents who hid the universal genius of their offspring until the appropriate moment."[121] Indeed, this idea is repeated verbatim by Schuon who characterized Judaism (i.e., "Mosaism") as an inward-looking and servile "carrier" religion:

> Indeed Mosaism—every question of exaggeration or stylization notwithstanding—has the vocation of being the preserving ark of both the Abrahamic and Sinaitic heritage, the "ghetto" of the One and Invisible God, who speaks and acts, but who does so only for an Israel that is impenetrable and turned in on itself and that puts all the emphasis on the Covenant and obedience […].[122]

Yet, Renan and those who followed him held that what was preserved from the core of the so-called Sinaitic heritage was indeed a transcultural and transhistorical prophetic tradition that taught a universal message "not strictly Jewish or Semitic."[123] As Masuzawa observes, "It was as though, as far as the Jews were concerned, the voice of the prophets had indeed come from afar and from an alien world, bearing a universal salvific message."[124]

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[120] Ibid., 53.

[121] Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 193.

[122] Schuon, *Sufism*, 104.

[123] Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 191. Besides Renan, Masuzawa notes how similar ideas were forwarded by Abraham Kuenen and Otto Pfleiderer (ibid., 198).

[124] Ibid, 198.

Perhaps this is why Renan goes out of his way to make the particular correspondence between the "Semitic prophet" and the "Indian *Avatar*."[125] Similarly, Schuon repeatedly uses the concept of avatar as a synonym for prophet.[126] Like Renan who further differentiates between avatar and prophet, noting that while the avatar is a divine incarnation, the prophet is a chosen instrument of revelation,[127] Schuon categorizes such difference as "major and minor *Avatāras*, complete and partial incarnations" respectively. Schuon goes on to importantly clarify the difference between the two: "Christ, who *identifies the divine Message with himself*, belongs to the first of these two categories whereas the Prophet, who *passively receives* the Message that God 'causes to descend', belongs to the second […]."[128] It is thus in the difference between these two characterizations that we can fully understand Schuon's above differentiation between Aryan "intellectionism" and Semitic "inspirationism," recalling that according to Schuon, Aryan intellectualism derives "*from a permanent and 'naturally supernatural' capacity*," while Semitic inspirationism derives solely from "grace." In other words, Aryan intellectualism as a "supernatural" capacity is in accordance with the "major" Avatara, whom Christ resembles as a Divine manifestation, whereas Semitic inspirationism as a passive influx of grace accords with Schuon's notion of

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[125] Ernest Renan, *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, 2nd ed. (Paris: A l'Imprimerie Impériale, 1858), 8. See also Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, 64.

[126] E.g., Schuon states: "In a certain sense revelation is the intellection of the collectivity, or rather it takes its place; it is the only way of knowing for the collectivity as such, and this is why the *Avatāra* through whom the revelation is brought about must—in his normative perfection—incarnate the humanity he at once represents and illumines." Frithjof Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007), 118.

[127] Renan, *Histoire générale*, 8.

[128] Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 71 (emphasis mine). Similarly, Schuon elsewhere notes: "The *Avatâra* is Divine Man and human God; *grosso modo*, Islam opts for the first of these aspects and Christianity for the second." Frithjof Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions*, trans. Mark Perry and Jean-Pierre LaFouge (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002), 93.

"minor" Avatara and the Arab Prophet. Such distinctions revolve around the notion that the Semitic "genius" is completely independent of the Semitic "nature" itself. As Maurice Olender notes in the context of Renanian discourse: "Although the Hebrew did indeed recognize that God is one, that truth descended upon him: he had no responsibility in the matter. His monotheism was in no sense a product of his mind."[129]

Like most of his Aryanist predecessors, however, Schuon could not deny outright the "Semitic" genealogy connecting Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In a passage in *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, Schuon claimed that "Aryan thought" records the very "nature of things," while "Semitic thought" was rather "a process of transmission and persuasion."[130] Accordingly, in "the Golden Age," the truth itself was sufficient, but later it was "necessary *to clothe it in an argument efficacious for certain mentalities*, and this is what the Semitic religions have done."[131] Yet, Schuon also followed his predecessors in arguing for a deeper universal prophetic truth that transcends the narrow confines of such Semitic genealogy and its attendant "mentalities." Thus, Schuon goes on in the same passage to note that

> *the fundamental enunciations of the religions* remain outside these categories: the Christ-given idea that "God descended so that man might rise", or the Islamic idea that "there is no god but God", *while being Semitic in certain of their aspects, have at the same time a universal character that is open to every possibility of the spirit.*[132]

The circular logic of such an assertion is clear: even though these "universal" conceptions originate from Semitic contexts, since they are indeed universal, they must be other than Semitic.

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[129] Olender, *The Languages of Paradise*, 66.

[130] Frithjof Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976), 146.

[131] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[132] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

While Schuon's above assertion that seemingly finds the same "universal character" in Christianity as in Islam may lead us to think that he found both traditions to be equally universal, a closer reading proves this not to be the case. In terms of Christianity breaking from the Semitic "framework" of Judaism, Schuon notes that "nascent Christianity was opposed to legalistic and formalistic Judaism […]." "Having shattered the formal Mosaic framework in the name of the essence, *the Christian message acted as an esoterism* […]."[133] While I will return to Schuon's conception of Islam in relation to Christianity momentarily, here suffice it to note that in addition to the above claim that "*the Christian message acted as an esoterism*," Schuon elsewhere maintains that the language of Christianity is "*on the whole more 'Aryan' than that of Moslem piety*, hence more direct and more open […]."[134]

Schuon's perception of Christianity as more or less "Aryan" is—like much of his comparative religionist discourse—an iteration of similar nineteenth century Aryanist conceptions. The idea that Jesus was an Aryan and not a Jew became popular around the turn of the twentieth century within various intellectual and esoteric circles and was ultimately adopted by members of the National Socialist Party who wished to appear congruent with Christianity.[135] Renan's ideas proved once again to be formative in this arena with his controversial work *The Life of Jesus* (Vie de Jésus, 1863), which in the words of Olender "saved Jesus from Judaism."[136] Thus, Renan bluntly states that Jesus "*represents the rupture*

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[133] Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, 2 (emphasis mine). Indeed, elsewhere Schuon expands on the idea of Christianity as "an esoterism": "The first mode of esoterism brings about the interiorization—or spiritualization—of the Law, and this is Christianity as distinct from Mosaism […]." Schuon, *The Fullness of God*, 173.

[134] Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, 176 (emphasis mine).

[135] Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 117.

[136] Olender, *The Languages of Paradise*, 71.

with the Jewish spirit."[137] "The Law," for Renan's Jesus "does not appear to have had much charm for him," while "the religious lyrics of the Psalms were in marvellous accordance with *his poetic soul.*"[138] While "[n]o doubt, Jesus proceeded from Judaism," according to Renan "*he proceeded from it as Socrates proceeded from the schools of the Sophists* […]."[139] Renan situated Jesus' true home in Galilee, whose "free life" was "like perfume from another world […]."[140] Conversely, Jerusalem as representative of "Judea" was as city of "littleness of mind." Moreover, according to Renan:

> Its fanaticism was extreme, […] *the study of the Law*, pushed to the most insignificant minutiae, and reduced to questions of casuistry, was the only study. *This exclusively theological and canonical culture contributed in no respect to refine the intellect.* It was something analogous to *the barren doctrine of the Mussulman fakir* […].[141]

As Kidd notes, "Nobody did more to popularise the Aryan interpretation of Christ than Houston Stewart Chamberlain."[142] Following Renan, Chamberlain's section "Christ not a Jew" in *Foundations* begins with the claim that Jesus' "advent is not the perfecting of the Jewish religion but its negation."[143] Chamberlain thus asserted that the "formalism" of the Jews "choked" the "genuine religion" that Jesus opened up, while Jesus himself broke the laws of the Jews when needed, "*for what has all this to do with religion*?"[144] Thus,

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[137] Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, trans. Charles Edwin Wilbour (London: Trübner and Co., 1864), 309 (emphasis mine).

[138] Ibid., 57 (emphasis mine).

[139] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[140] Ibid., 141.

[141] Ibid., 159 (emphasis mine).

[142] Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 49.

[143] Chamberlain, *Foundations*, vol. 1, 221.

[144] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

Chamberlain inquires "where is the people, which, awakened by Christ to life, has gained for itself the precious right-of calling Christ its own? *Certainly not in Judea*!"[145]

As might be expected, Chamberlain transposes the lineage of Jesus' religion from Semitic Judea to Aryan India and the Vedanta.[146] In this too, he follows Renan's lead, who saw in Christ's predecessor, John the Baptist, the "life of a Yogi of India," which was "so opposed to the spirit of the ancient Jewish people" that it more resembled the "*gourous* of Brahminism."[147] Indeed, Renan asks: "might there not in this be a remote influence of the *mounis* of India?"[148] Schuon, like Renan and even more so Chamberlain, situates Jesus' proper place in India, noting that

> Jesus has the function of a regenerator: he is the great prophet of inwardness, and as such he should have been accepted by Israel as Isaiah was; however, *this acceptance presupposed a spiritual suppleness more fitting of India* than Judea.[149]

The late nineteenth century Aryanization of Christianity was paralleled by a concurrent conceit, i.e., the Semitization of Islam. As Renan stated quite plainly: "The continuation of Judaism was not Christianity but Islam."[150] From this point on, the Muslim was recast as a desert Arab who was prototypically "Semitic."[151] In line with such Aryanist Semitization of Islam, Schuon notes that "[o]n the surface of Islam we meet with the features

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[145] Chamberlain, *Foundations*, vol. 1, 202.

[146] Chamberlain, *Foundations*, vol. 2, 412. Chamberlain developed from Renan's spiritual difference of Jesus' home in Galilee an even more radical assertion of racial difference: i.e., that the word "Galilee" meant "district of the heathen," and as such was home of "non-Israelitic aborigines" that had long before been seeded by "purely Aryan blood." Chamberlain, *Foundations*, vol. 1, 202, 205.

[147] Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, 94, 95.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Schuon, *Form and Substance*, 228 (emphasis mine).

[150] Ernest Renan quoted in Olender, *The Languages of Paradise*, 70.

[151] Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 179.

of the Bedouin mentality, which obviously have nothing universal about them […]." Yet,

Schuon immediately qualifies this statement with his customary recourse to the

essentialization of "religion" *as such*: "in the fundamental elements, however, we encounter

as it were religion as such, which by its essentiality opens quite naturally onto metaphysics

and gnosis."[152] Even though such an admission of universality appears to raise Islam up to

the level of Christianity, according to Schuon, the religion of Muhammad ultimately remains

"wholly Semitic" and thus distinct from the more Aryan disposition of Christ:

> Since it was not necessary for Muhammad to present himself—any more than Abraham and
> Moses—as the Manifestation of the Absolute, he could, like them, remain *wholly Semitic in*
> *style*, a style which attaches itself meticulously to human things, not scanting even the
> smallest; *whereas in Christ*—paradoxically and providentially—*there is an element that*
> *brings him closer to the Aryan world*, that is, *a tendency in his nature toward the idealistic*
> *simplification of earthly contingencies.*[153]

Here, Schuon's classification of Muhammad's "Semitic" style posits a mentality that is

attached "meticulously to human things" in opposition to Christ's "Aryan" tendency towards

a Platonic "idealism," i.e., a metaphysical realm that transcends the human world of material

reality.[154] Indeed, after apologizing for what may strike the reader as "ill-sounding," Schuon

clarifies in a footnote that "*we shall say that Christ, who was destined to be an 'Aryan god',*

has himself, by way of anticipation, a certain Aryan quality, which shows itself in his

independence—seemingly 'Greek' or 'Hindu'—toward forms […]."[155]

Such a comparison between the Semitic "worldly" Muhammad and the Aryan

"formless" Christ is once again a forceful and clear reiteration of an Aryanist conceit

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[152] Frithjof Schuon, *Roots of the Human Condition* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1991), 81.

[153] Schuon, *Form and Substance*, 24 (emphasis mine).

[154] See Arne Grøn, "Idealism," in *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, ed. J. Wentzel Vrede van Huyssteen, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003), 446.

[155] Schuon, *Form and Substance*, 24n19 (emphasis mine).

deprecating a Semitic "materialism" notable for its voluntarism, ritualism, and lack of metaphysics.[156] As Chamberlain succinctly states: "Pure materialism is the religious doctrine of the Arab Mohammed […]."[157] Chamberlain continues to note that "[w]herever the Semitic spirit has breathed, we shall meet with this materialism. *Elsewhere in the whole world religion is an idealistic impulse* […]." But "*in the case of the Semites*," Chamberlain asserts, "the imperious will immediately lays hold of every symbol, every profound divination of reflective thought*, and transforms them into hard empirical facts. And thus it is that with this view of religion only practical ends are pursued, no ideal ones*."[158]

In *Castes and Races*, Schuon echoes Chamberlain's conception of Semitic materialism by asserting that because of the absence of the caste system in Semitic religions, there is an imposition of "*a certain mental uniformity*" on people of different spiritual capacities. Such a mode of "collectivity," notes Schuon, "represents a principle tending to increase density and complexity; *it is always ready to lend an absolute character to facts*, and this is the tendency for which religious dogmatism makes allowance from the outset."[159] It is such Semitic dogmatism, Schuon continues to note, that ultimately creates "*doctrinal simplification and a need for external activities which are the very antipodes of intellection and contemplation*."[160] Conversely, "the pure and direct character of *Vedantic metaphysics*

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[156] Schuon attempts to ameliorate this statement by asserting that "[a]s for the 'independence' of the Aryan spirit, it must be specified that this can be a quality or a defect, depending on the case, exactly as Semitic formalism can be; all told the whole question is relative, and each thing must be put in its proper place." Schuon, *Form and Substance*, 24n19. However, in the context of the discourse analyzed in the present chapter, such a caveat rings hollow.

[157] Chamberlain, *Foundations*, vol. 1, 420.

[158] Ibid., 422 (emphasis mine).

[159] Schuon, *Castes and Races*, 24.

[160] Ibid..

would be inconceivable apart from the caste system […]." Since no such imposed spirituo-racial hierarchy exists "[i]n the Semitic religions," according to Schuon, "*esotericism is closely bound up with exotericism* and vice versa."[161] "[N]o one can deny," as Schuon notes elsewhere, "that in Semitic doctrines the formulations and rules are usually determined by considerations of dogmatic, moral, and social opportuneness."[162] Therefore, the Semitic traditions of jurisprudence and ritual practice—or the "*need for external activities*" as Schuon puts it above—are in fact the very opposite of Aryan "intellection and contemplation."

Putting Ibn 'Arabi in "Esoteric Context": The Problem of Ashʿarism

No other metaphysician so lionized by Traditionalists has challenged Schuon's robust Aryanist framework as Ibn 'Arabi,[163] who not only professed pure Arab descent, as his name suggests,[164] but whose metaphysical discourse was thoroughly steeped within the Islamic textual tradition of his medieval milieu, as has been shown in the previous chapters. As was noted in chapter 2, Schuon praises Ibn 'Arabi as "the great enunciator of gnosis in Islam,"[165] and thus as an important representative of the *religio perennis*.[166] Yet, he also takes Ibn 'Arabi to task for "*divergent interpretations—one esoteric and the other exoteric* […]"[167] and

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[161] Schuon, *Castes and Races*, 24 (emphasis mine).

[162] Schuon, *Sufism*, 135.

[163] For a brief genealogy of the original Traditionalist engagement with Ibn 'Arabi see chapter 2, pp. 156-59.

[164] For a detailed account of Ibn 'Arabi's family lineage see Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabī* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 17-18.

[165] Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1998), 37.

[166] Frithjof Schuon, *Light on the Ancient Worlds* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 120.

[167] Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, 125.

elsewhere disparages the "unevenness and contradictions" in his thought "owing above all to his at least *partial solidarity with ordinary theology* […]."[168]

For example, when Ibn 'Arabi exalts Muhammad over Joseph in the *Fuṣūṣ*,[169] Schuon asserts: "*one has a right to expect a more nuanced and objective perspective in an esoteric context*."[170] Similarly, Ibn 'Arabi's auto-exegetical statement that his "religion of love is the prerogative of Muslims; for the station of the most perfect love has been imparted exclusively to the Prophet Muhammad and not the other Prophets"[171] is derided by Schuon as an "*abrupt and unintelligible denominationalism*," the "extenuating circumstance" of which is due to "the fact that for each religion the Prophet who founded it is the sole personification of the total, not the partial, *Logos*."[172] "Nonetheless," Schuon continues,

> one might expect an esoterist not to enclose himself in this concept-symbol but, since he has opted for the essence, *to take into account the relativity of forms*, even those that are dear to him, and to *do so in an objective and concrete*, and not merely metaphorical, manner—*or else remain silent, for pity's sake*.[173]

Such corrective reprimands not only evince an exasperation with Ibn 'Arabi's recourse to Islamic normativity, but also, and more importantly, a perceived infringement upon a particular bounded discourse (i.e., "the relativity of forms"). In setting Ibn 'Arabi straight when he is found venturing outside of the decorum deemed proper for an "esoterist," Schuon

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[168] Schuon, *Sufism*, 33 (emphasis mine).

[169] I.e., "See then […] how excellent are the knowledge and rank of Muhammad!" Ibn 'Arabi quoted in Schuon, *Sufism*, 44.

[170] Schuon, *Sufism*, 45 (emphasis mine).

[171] Ibn 'Arabi quoted in Schuon, *Sufism*, 40n29. Schuon seems to be following Reynold Nicholson's translation of the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* here. Regarding Nicholson's translation of "Moslems" for *al-muḥammadiyyīn*, see the discussion in chapter 1, pp. 49-52.

[172] Schuon, *Sufism*, 40n29 (emphasis mine).

[173] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

apparently follows his great Renaissance predecessor, Agostino Steuco (d. 1548), whose

1540 work *De perenni philosophia* coined the term *philosophia perennis*.[174] As Theobald

Freudenberger notes, if a passage of an ancient poet or philosopher used by Steuco "refuses

to fit into his system, he earnestly addresses the author and admonishes him in a fatherly way

to come to his senses."[175]

Like Steuco's admonishments, Schuon's reproach of Ibn 'Arabi's "abrupt and

unintelligible denominationalism" above revolves around a particular "system" of esoteric

principles, which he succinctly relates at the end of his above critique. "One is obliged,"

notes Schuon, "to take note of the *de facto* existence of <u>two esoterisms</u>, one partially

formalistic and the other perfectly consistent, all the more so as facts cannot be at the level of

principles."[176] While this rather opaque statement is left here without additional explanation,

Schuon elucidates its meaning further in an essay published several years later, appropriately

entitled "Two Esoterisms."[177] In explicating its first sense, Schuon follows one of the earliest

usages of "esotericism" and employs the term in complementary relation to its binary

opposite "exotericism."[178] As such, Schuon notes:

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[174] See Charles B. Schmitt, "Perrenial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27, no. 4 (1966): 515-24. Steuco believed that true theology "is nothing other than the revealed truth which has been known to mankind from the earliest times" (ibid., 518). See also the introduction to this study, p. 4n12.

[175] Theobald Freudenberger quoted in Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 72.

[176] Schuon, *Sufism*, 40n29 (underline mine).

[177] Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, 115-22. (Originally published as *Résumé de métaphysique intégrale*, 1985).

[178] While the adjective "esoteric" can be traced to a satire by Lucian of Samosata in the second century C.E., the noun "esotericism" (*also* esoterism) is of relatively recent occurrence, first appearing in French (*l'ésotérisme*) in 1828. In 1839, Jacques Etienne Marconis de Nègre employed the neologism to denote the division of "sacred science in exotericism or external science and esotericism or internal science." As Wouter Hanegraaff notes, "esotericism" may refer to various typological constructs of religions activity having to do with "secrecy," but

> Where there is a truth of Revelation, hence of formal and theological truth, there must also be *a truth of intellection, hence of non-formal and metaphysical truth; not legalistic or obligatory truth, but truth that stems from the nature of things*, and which is also vocational since not every man grasps this nature.[179]

In this concise definition, Schuon posits esoteric truth in terms of a series of binary opposites. Esoteric truth is a "*metaphysical*" mode of "*intellection*" that originates from the very "*nature of things*." Such truth is opposed to the "formal and theological truth" of "Revelation," which is by implication "legalistic or obligatory truth." Finally, esoteric truth is "vocational," i.e., discernable only by an elite, since not everyone is capable of grasping its nature.

In offering a second definition, however, Schuon further reifies the concept of esotericism and gives it a unique autonomy decoupled from any relationship to its exoteric Other. Here, esotericism "is not, in its intrinsic reality, *a complement* or a half." Rather, for Schuon, "esoterism as such is metaphysics," indeed it is "*the total truth as such*."[180] As "the total truth," this pure form of esotericism is inherently different than an "*esoterism of a particular religion*," which "*tends to adapt itself to this religion and thereby enter into theological, psychological and legalistic meanders foreign to its nature* […]."[181] For Schuon, therefore, there are two distinct kinds of esoteric doctrines: (i) "pure," "true," "intrinsic," or "universal" esotericism (which Schuon also refers to as metaphysics, intellection, *gnosis*, the

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its early usage in association "with the deeper, 'inner mysteries of religion' as opposed to its merely external or 'exoteric' dimensions" is the primary sense through which proponents of Perennialism (along with religionists such as Eliade, Corbin, and Carl Jung) deploy the term. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Esotericism," *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 336, 337.

[179] Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics*, 115 (emphasis mine).

[180] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[181] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

primordial religion, *religio perennis* etc.), and (ii) esotericisms attached to particular religions, or what Schuon calls "esoterism-complements."

For example, "*Advaita-Vedānta*" is "unquestionably," for Schuon, "an intrinsic esoterism, and as such suffices unto itself; but it is not an esoterism-complement, that is, an esoterism found alongside a religious system of a sentimental character."[182] Yet, as Schuon makes clear in *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, Sufism is an esotericism-complement because its doctrine seeks "to combine two tendencies, Platonism and Asharism." Platonism, like Vedanta, is an example of "true metaphysics" where "the true, the beautiful, and the good are such because they manifest qualities proper to the Principle, or to the Essence […]." Yet, in Sufism, Platonism is combined with the "ordinary" theological tradition of Ashʿarism, which proclaims "that the true, the beautiful, and the good are such because God wills it so without our being able to know why […]."[183]

In Ashʿarism, which according to Schuon is not only voluntaristic but also "viscerally moralistic and therefore individualistic,"[184] God is understood to possess the power simply by His free will to determine reality "as if will had its sufficient reason in itself and as if freedom could logically and ontologically include the absurd […]."[185] Similarly, "man is defined as will predestined for obedience and apparently free in its choices 'if God wills'."[186]

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[182] Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics*, 118. Elsewhere, Schuon explains "sentimental" as that which is the *limiting factor* in any given exoteric religion: "To speak of sentimentality is to speak of limitation: the margin of sentiment that envelops each one of the religions proves in its fashion the limit of all exoterism and, as a result, the limits of exoteric claims." Schuon, *Form and Substance*, 16.

[183] Schuon, *Sufism*, 31.

[184] Schuon repeatedly denigrates Semitic Ashʿarism as "individualistic," which echoes Lassen's critique of Semitic subjectivism. See pp. 178 above and 205n211 below.

[185] Schuon, *Sufism*, 31 (emphasis mine).

[186] Ibid.

It is exactly this type of voluntarism that Schuon disparages throughout his oeuvre again and again as being counter to any notion of authentic esotericism. As such, Schuon pointedly notes that "Sufism obviously approaches pure *gnosis* to the extent it is Platonic […] and it departs from it to the extent it capitulates to Asharism."[187]

Schuon concludes the above discussion by pointing out how the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being), generally associated with Ibn ʿArabi,[188] is tainted with an Ashʿarī voluntarism since in it "everything that exists is 'good' because it is 'willed by God' […]. We are not told why God does not love certain things even though all things are good 'in themselves' […]."[189] Schuon thus notes, "Here the most vertiginous metaphysics is combined with the most summary Asharism."[190] Yet in a similar discussion elsewhere, Schuon directly equates Ibn ʿArabi's related occasionalism to "the Hanbalite and Asharite negation of secondary causes and natural laws."[191] Indeed, in *Sufism*, Schuon takes Ibn ʿArabi to task for supporting "the *excessive fideism* of the Hanbalites,"[192] a school (*madhhab*) of law and theology known for its populist traditionalism and radical anthropomorphism.[193] In yet another work, Schuon claims that "it is from Hanbalism that Asharite *kalām* inherited

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[187] Schuon, *Sufism*, 31.

[188] Ibn ʿArabi, however, never used the term. See William Chittick, "Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*," in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rūmī*, ed. Amin Banani, Richard Hovannisian, and Georges Sabagh (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[189] Schuon, *Sufism*, 31.

[190] Ibid.

[191] Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, 124 (emphasis mine).

[192] Schuon, *Sufism*, 65 (emphasis mine).

[193] Khalid Blankinship, "The Early Creed," in *The Cambridge Companion to classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 52.

its most questionable theses."[194] In linking Ḥanbalism and Ashʿarism, Schuon creates a

powerful—albeit reductive[195]—genealogy of *anti-philosophical* and *fideistic literalism* in

which he situates Ibn ʿArabi's metaphysics. Thus, Schuon reproaches the Andalusian Sufi for

both a "confused" hermeneutic—which is "*independent of every question of dialectic*"

combining esoteric *and* exoteric interpretations—and an excessive fideism resulting from his

monistic absorption.[196] Although Schuon's portrayal of Ashʿarī voluntarism and

occasionalism reproduces a rather radical and unhistorical stereotype,[197] it serves throughout

his works as a symbol of a wider typology that should by now be familiar:

> *Like all Semitic theologians* Ashari has in mind only the opposition between the created and
> the Creator and not the participation—nonetheless necessary—of the former in the latter,
> whence the negation of secondary causes and natural laws that is characteristic of
> Asharism.[198]

If "the negation of secondary causes and natural laws that is characteristic of Asharism" is a

trait common to "Semitic theologians," then it should not surprise that the reason Platonism

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[194] Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 164.

[195] Because al-Ashʿarī did claim to be a Ḥanbalī, his doctrine is often reduced to Ḥanbalī non-rational literalism. Yet, historically Ashʿarism was a synthesis between it and rationalism. As W. Montgomery Watt notes, even though "to a European reader [al-Ashʿari's] argumentation differs little at first sight from that of the ultra-conservative followers of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal," al-Ashʿarī was in no way adverse to using rational argument. W. Montgomery Watt, "al-Ashʿarī, Abu 'l-Ḥasan," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 694. See also Roy Jackson, *Fifty Key Figures in Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006), 58-59.

[196] Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, 124-25, 125n29 (emphasis mine). It should be noted here, that Ibn ʿArabi himself was critical of voluntarism. As he asserts in the *Fuṣūṣ*: "There are some rationalists of weak intellect, for whom it has been proven that God does what He wills, who go on to warrant for God, the Most High, what contradicts wisdom and the reality of things in itself. As such, some thinkers have strayed so far as to deny contingency […]. Yet, the person of realization affirms contingency." Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Abul Ela Affifi (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-ʿArabi, 1966), 67.

[197] As Frank Griffel recently observes, "Often occasionalism is so closely connected to early Ashaʿrism that it is almost regarded as a necessary constituent of that theology. That, however, is not the case." Following Daniel Gimaret and Richard M. Frank, Griffel thus notes that "at no point in Ashʿarite history did they defend a radical occasionalist position that completely denies efficacy to created beings. Most early Ashaʿrites acknowledged that human decisions trigger their actions even if they are not the only sufficient cause." Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 132.

[198] Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 150-51 (emphasis mine).

is opposite to Ashʿarism in this respect is because, according to Schuon, Plato "*belonged intellectually to the Aryan world*, and his doctrine *is like a distant modality of Brahmanism* […]."[199] According to Schuon, this Aryan-Vedantist typology facilitated in Plato "the actualization of pure intellection"[200] as opposed to the fideism of al-Ashʿarī. It is here that Schuon's ideological hermeneutic behind his assertion of Ibn 'Arabi's deficient "dialectic" and so called "confusion" between the esoteric and exoteric begins to surface. Indeed, elsewhere Schuon clarifies that the problem is again seemingly due to a difference in typology:

> *Greeks and especially Hindus have long possessed the instrument of dialectic*, for it corresponds to their sense of objectivity, *whereas it was missing among the early Semites, as well as for nascent Islam* […].[201]

Thus, while Plato's dialectical thought was made possible because of the Greek genealogical connection to Hinduism (i.e., Brahmanism above) and the "Aryan world," al-Ashʿarī as a "Semitic theologian" inherently lacks such an "instrument" and is thus *unable* to rise to the level of impartial truth, i.e., "objectivity." Elsewhere, Schuon similarly notes that "the reasoning of Semites" is based merely upon a "dogmatic" certitude and a wish to "communicate and reinforce what is evident," in opposition to that of "Greeks and Hindus" whose mode of reasoning is "*a dialectic that is concerned with doing justice to the nature of things*." Schuon thus concludes that such lack of Semitic impartiality "explains the weakness of certain arguments of Sufis themselves."[202] Here, Schuon concisely summarizes the issue that appears to be the basis of his remarks on Ibn 'Arabi above and the attendant problem of

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[199] Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, 78.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Schuon, *Form and Substance*, 210 (emphasis mine).

[202] Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 165 (emphasis mine).

Sufism in relation to its so-called tension between Platonism and Asharism. Sufism is in Schuon's mind ultimately a "Semitic" modality of spirituality because it lacks the "dialectic" of an intellectualist or naturalist discourse that recognizes reality, or "nature," as imbued with an unchangeable "universal" law that is autonomously knowable through the intellect.[203] This Schuon opposes to Semitic "moralism," or voluntarism, which gives God's will the ultimate power in deciding the moral value of things.[204]

Indeed, Schuon's repeated criticism of Semitic "voluntarism" is precisely paralleled in Chamberlain, who writes that for the "genuinely Semitic faith […] Will triumphs."[205] For Chamberlain, this is so not only because of "its uncommon strength," but as a "consequence of the impoverishment of the understanding and the imagination" of the Semite. Thus, "*opposed to a minimum of religion* we find a maximum of unconditional, unshakeable capacity of faith […]."[206] Like Schuon, Chamberlain opposes Semitic voluntarism to Hinduism: "while the Indian taught the negation of will, […] religion is for the Semite the idolization of his will, its most glowing, immoderate and fanatical assertion."[207] In the following passage, Chamberlain brings together Aryanism and natural law theory in

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[203] Schuon thus makes "Platonism" a synecdoche for "natural law theory" as originated by classical Greek philosophers and fully developed by the Stoics. This "intellectualist" idea is marked by the notion that God is bound by the rational laws that He (or the *Logos*) created the universe with originally. In terms of morality, that which is good is thus intrinsically so in relationship to the created, purposeful order of the universe and not according to the will of God as potentially separate from such order. See Patrick D. Hopkins, "Natural Law," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Donald M. Borchert, vol. 6, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006), 505-517.

[204] While Greek naturalism is also reflected in Muʿtazilī rationalism, Schuon decidedly chooses to identify directly with the Greek lineage of Platonism in opposing Ashʿarī voluntarism and occasionalism. For a brief overview of the tradition of theological voluntarism in Islamic ethics see Daniel Brown, "Islamic Ethics in Comparative Perspective," *The Muslim World* 89, no. 2 (1999): 181-185.

[205] Chamberlain, *Foundations*, vol. 1, 423.

[206] Ibid.

[207] Ibid., 419.

opposition to Islamic and Jewish voluntarism that concludes with a strikingly familiar

diatribe:

> *The abnormally developed will of the Semites* can lead to two extremes: either to rigidity, as *in the case of Mohammed*, where the idea of the unlimited divine caprice is predominant; or, *as is the case with the Jews*, to the phenomenal elasticity, which is produced by the conception of their own human arbitrariness. *To the Indo-European both paths are closed.* In *nature he observes everywhere the rule of law, and of himself he knows that he can only achieve his highest when he obeys inner need.* […] Of ourselves, we should certainly never have arrived at the conception of a free almighty God and of what may be called an "arbitrary Providence," *a Providence, that is, which can decree something in one way, and then in answer to prayers or from other motives decide in a contrary direction.*[208]

Schuon's discourse on "Semitic" Ashʿarism thus echoes Western scholarship that has

traditionally defined Ashʿarism as "ethical voluntarism"—or in George F. Hourani's terms

"theistic subjectivism."[209] Indeed, in contrast to such Ashʿarī "subjectivism," Hourani

himself defines the thought of Plato and Aristotle as "objectivism."[210] As noted above,

Schuon similarly opposes "objectivity" with "subjectivity," but within an Aryan/Semitic

opposition. This oft-repeated dichotomy in Schuon's writings echoes those common in

Lassen, Renan, and Chamberlain where the "subjective" sentimentality of the Semitic

mentality does not have the necessary self-distance to experience higher forms of poetic and

philosophical thought.[211] Thus, in *Logic and Transcendence* (Logique et Transcendance,

1970), Schuon notes:

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[208] Chamberlain, *Foundations*, vol. 1, 242-3.

[209] George F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 17.

[210] Ibid., 22.

[211] See p. 178 above. Lassen understood Semitic subjectivism to be a form of self-absorption where as Arvidsson explains "everything circles around the self […]. Consequently, Semitic poetry, for example, is just a place where the poet can pour out his completely private feelings and passions. Literary genres such as epic and drama, that require the poet to keep his personality in the background, are completely missing in Semitic literature." Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 94 see also 95-96

> *Platonists and Vedantists* are interested first and foremost in the Real—*in what truly is* rather than in what we can or must or will do; *they do not dwell on the subjective accidents of realization*; […] on the contrary the emphasis is placed on a metaphysical description of the Real and its gradations. *Semites*, on the other hand, *stress a subjective way of attaining what is; the Real is enclosed in a dogma*, and the whole emphasis is placed on the unfolding of the subjective experiences of realization.[212]

Similarly, in *Sufism*, Schuon states that "Aryans are objectivists […] while Semites are subjectivists […]. It is the difference between intellectualism and voluntarism […]."[213]As with Lassen and Renan, Schuon's insistence on linking "objectivity" with Aryans and "subjectivity" with Semites is not value neutral even though he occasionally endeavors to mitigate, and thus ostensibly equalize, the difference between these binaries by noting their negative potentials.[214] Yet, such attempts ultimately ring hollow in light of the essentializing qualifiers that Schuon associates with each. Indeed, in *Echoes of Perennial Wisdom* (Les Perles du pelerine, 1990), Schuon claims that the "*prerogative of the human state is objectivity* […]." "Objectivity *is none other than the truth*," furthers Schuon, "in which the subject and the object coincide, and in which *the essential takes precedence over the accidental* […]."[215] It is thus clear that "objectivity" for Schuon is analogous to his above notion of "esoterism" as "*the total truth as such*"—thus both esotericism and its attendant "primordial" objectivity fall within the special province of Aryans, who as we may recall are, according to Schuon, "*above all metaphysicians.*"[216] In light of such ideological discourse

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[212] Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, 128.

[213] Schuon, *Sufism*, 21.

[214] E.g., Schuon qualifies his statement above by adding: "deviated objectivism gives rise to rationalism and scientism whereas excessive subjectivism engenders all the illogicalities and pious absurdities of which a sentimental, zealous, and conventional fideism is capable" (ibid., 21).

[215] Schuon, *Echoes of Perennial Wisdom*, trans. Mark Perry and Jean-Pierre Lafouge (Bloomington: World Wisdom), 60 (emphasis mine).

[216] Schuon, *Sufism*, 21.

that gives the Aryan special access to pure "objectivity" (as distinct from "*the subjective accidents of realization*"), Schuon's above demurral regarding Ibn 'Arabi's exaltation of Muhammad over Joseph—i.e., that "one has a right to *expect a more nuanced and objective perspective* in an esoteric context"—takes on added meaning. It is to this expectation and its discursive manifestations that we now turn.

De-Semitizing Ibn 'Arabi: Finding Vedanta in the Naked Virgin

The primary problem with Semitic subjectivism, according to Schuon, is its inability to distinguish the underlying formlessness of the Real from the contingent dogmas presented by the various religions. Like his Aryanist predecessors, Schuon linked this Semitic "confusion" with the inherent nature of monotheistic "inspirationism," which was incapable of higher order, metaphysical insight that affords objective understanding. Indeed, as was noted in the introduction to this chapter, this was precisely his critique of Sufism, which he claimed was linked to the "*anti-metaphysical and moralizing creationism of the monotheistic theologies*," and thus keep it from sufficiently acknowledging the "the principle of relativity."[217] The ability to accommodate this principle is what Schuon elsewhere refers to as "the esoteric vision of things" that allows the esotericist to detect the limits of religious "totalitarianism,"[218] i.e., religious absolutism. As Schuon notes, "Inwardly or substantially, the claims a religion makes are absolute, but outwardly or formally, namely on the plane of human contingency, they are *necessarily relative*."[219] "The principle of relativity" is thus a key tenet for Schuon's emblematic notion of "the transcendent unity of religions" and its

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[217] Ibid., 24.

[218] Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, 161.

[219] Schuon, *Form and Substance*, 16.

attendant notion of the universal validity of religions, which was discussed in chapter 2. It is thus important to note that "intrinsic esoterism"—and its associated principles of the relativity, transcendent unity, and universal validity of religions—represented for Schuon the entire *raison d'être* of his Sufi *ṭarīqa*. As Schuon notes in a 1980 letter to a disciple, before and at the foundation of the *ṭarīqa* "the question did not arise a priori as to the nature of Sufism, but *only the question as to how esoterism as such could manifest and assert itself anew*."[220] As is evinced here and in a letter dated a year later, Schuon positions his *ṭarīqa*, the ʿAlāwiyya Maryamiyya, as unique in the history of Sufism due to its "purely esoteric perspective" and its "metaphysical foundation" in "the Vedānta."[221]

Yet, as Schuon argues elsewhere, such "[s]trict and universal esoterism—of the 'advaitic' type so to speak—has necessarily always existed in the climate of Semitic monotheism […]." This is so, Schuon asserts, "for the simple reason that everywhere there are *men whose nature requires it*; namely, men whose intelligence, discernment and contemplativeness are proportionate to pure metaphysics and thus to the corresponding path."[222] In answer to the imagined demurral that "there are no documents proving the more or less traditional existence of this gnosis," Schuon responds:

> that is because it was of necessity transmitted orally—apart from certain providential exceptions which are also necessary—*given that gnosis is independent of the exoteric systems which may be its vehicle, and that therefore it inevitably comprises aspects that are incompatible with them*.[223]

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[220] Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters," December 1980, 2 (emphasis mine).

[221] Ibid., May 1981, 5.

[222] Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics*, 119.

[223] Ibid. (emphasis mine). Schuon here simply counters an *argumentum ad ignorantiam* with another, seemingly weaker one; i.e., there is no proof that *p* is true, therefore *p* is false vs. there is no proof that *p* is false, therefore *p* is true. See Douglas N. Walton, *Arguments from Ignorance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 26.

Indeed, Schuon adds that by such esotericism's "*recourse to intellection* it seems to make Revelation redundant and even superfluous […]."[224] Similarly, in an internal Maryamiyya directive, Schuon notes: "The philosophia perennis *is founded, essentially and intrinsically, upon the nature of things perceived by intellectual intuition*; it is only formally and extrinsically that it is founded upon a particular revealed Text, *and it could never be dependent on it*."[225] Like Schuon's above assertion decoupling gnosis from "the exoteric systems which may be its vehicle," thus "inevitably" comprising "incompatible" aspects with such systems, Schuon here notes:

> It may happen that the pure pneumatic will act in a manner foreign to a particular religious perspective and to particular prescriptions, *but it cannot happen that he act in a manner contrary to the nature of things*, for he bears the essential, universal and primordial Law in the depths of his own heart. For this very reason, *deviation or corruption is in his case impossible, whatever appearances from a particular limited perspective may be*.[226]

If such claims of the total spiritual autonomy and incorruptibility of pure esoteric intellection are read in the light of Schuon's repeated assertions above regarding the "'naturally supernatural' capacity" of Aryan "intellection,"[227] it should not surprise that Schuon describes his position as "messenger" of his unique *ṭarīqa* as particularly "Aryan." In a letter where Schuon refers to himself as "[t]he human instrument for the manifestation of the Religio perennis at the end of time […],"[228] Schuon further styles himself as "the messenger who brought the Tarīqah to Europe, and *there so to speak shaped it anew* […]."

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[224] Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics*, 119 (emphasis mine).

[225] Frithjof Schuon, "Not To Be Lost from Sight" (photocopy, unpublished Maryamiyya papers), 1075 (underline original, emphasis mine).

[226] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[227] Schuon, *Sufism*, 28.

[228] Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters," December 1980, 2 (underline original). This statement is corroborated by Schuon's wife Sa. Aminah. See Urban, "A Dance of Masks," 416.

Here, Schuon notes that while he is of European ancestry, he is "*above all a proto-Aryan and through this deeply rooted in the Hindu spirit, since indeed it has in a certain way kept alive the proto-Aryan spirit.*"[229]

While identifying himself as "above all a proto Aryan" in direct relationship to "the Hindu spirit," Schuon nevertheless continues in the same letter to note that he additionally has "a profound kinship with the world of Abraham," and thus "also with Islam." Yet here, Schuon importantly qualifies what *kind* of Islam: "Islam, *not as a mold for the world of Arab sentiment and impulse,* but *as a manifestation of the Primordial Religion at the end of time* […]."[230] Schuon goes on to assert that such a "Primordial" Islam specifically relates to "its opening towards gnosis and its emphasis upon steadfast remembrance of God, based on the Shahādah and the Supreme Name."[231] This description is made even more clear if read in the light of another recently published letter addressing what Schuon refers to as "pure Islam": "[*I*]*n Semitic doctrines the formulations and rules are usually determined by considerations of dogmatic, moral, and social opportuneness. But this cannot apply to pure Islam* […]."[232]

In the same letter, Schuon goes on to conceptualize "pure Islam" through Vedantic monistic statements of liberation,[233] asserting that "the *Shahādah* cannot but mean […] that 'you are That' (*tat tvam asi*), or that 'I am Brahma' (*aham Brahmāsmi*) […]."[234] Finally,

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[229] Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters," December 1980, 3 (underline original, emphasis mine).

[230] Ibid. (underline original, emphasis mine).

[231] Ibid. (underline original, emphasis mine).

[232] Schuon, *Sufism*, 135 (emphasis mine).

[233] Shankara was of the opinion that liberation could result through reflection on such "great statements" (i.e. the *mahāvākyas*). See John Taber, "Vedānta," in *The Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy*, ed. Jay L. Garfield and William Edelglass (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 153.

[234] Schuon, *Sufism*, 135 (emphasis mine).

Schuon asserts that according to "universal wisdom," the invocation of the supreme name of God (i.e., "Allah") "*contains and replaces all other rites* […]."[235] The reality of this fact is therefore "of decisive authority against those who would make the *sharīʿah* or *sunnah* into a kind of exclusive *karma-yoga*, and it even allows us to draw conclusions by analogy (*qiyās*, *ijtihād*) that most Shariites would find illicit […]."[236] Therefore "Pure Islam"—or Islam as "*a manifestation of the Primordial Religion at the end of time*" above—is for Schuon simply a metaphysical perception (i.e., intellection, *gnosis*, etc.) of reality that if grasped is sufficient unto itself—and thus "contains and replaces all other rites."

Nasr has vigorously argued that "Schuon was and remained rooted in the Islamic tradition to the moment of his death and knew more than anyone else that one cannot live beyond the world of forms […]."[237] Nasr additionally holds that Schuon's *ṭarīqa* "was based on pure Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxy."[238] While Schuon did insist on retaining the "traditional" form of Islam, it would seem that he did so only as a *formal means* to legitimize its transcendence. As Schuon states in a 1983 letter:

> A condition of the legitimacy of a spiritual school or community is the presence of the traditional form; in our case, Islam. Nevertheless, *the more conscious one is of the supra formal nature of spiritual Truth and Reality, the more conscious one must be also of the relativity of the traditional form*; and according to the spatial or temporal circumstances, *one must in one fashion or another manifest this consciousness*.[239]

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[235] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[236] Ibid. Indeed, in the same letter Schuon asserts that his universalism distinguishes him from "Muslim-born or converted individuals" in that "the universal authority of the metaphysical and initiatic traditions of Asia, *whose point of view reflects the nature of things more or less directly*, takes precedence […] over the generally more 'theological' authority of the monotheistic religions" (ibid., 134-35 [emphasis mine]).

[237] Nasr, "Frithjof Schuon," 272.

[238] Ibid., 259.

[239] Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters," January 1983, 10 (emphasis mine).

In an earlier letter, Schuon theorizes the manifestation of such supra formal "consciousness" and "relativity" of traditional form as "a moving away from the Religio formalis by virtue of a moving towards the Religio perennis […]." Here, Schuon explains that the "Religio perennis is the body," while "the Religio formalis is the garment […]."[240] While Schuon admits that Islam forms "the providential ground" for his ṭarīqa, he specifies that "the goal" of "the work" is "*not the Islamic form as such, but precisely esoterism,* and from this it follows that our Tarīqah as *vehicle of esoterism could not simply be absorbed in the Islamic form.*"[241]

In the same letter, Schuon relates that as part of an answer to his search for a new "framework" came the "Holy Virgin in a new form, corresponding directly to esoterism […]."[242] Indeed, as was mentioned in chapter 2, Schuon changed the name of his ṭarīqa to the ʿAlāwiyya Maryamiyya in the mid 1960s in response to repeated experiences and visions of the Virgin Mary, which marked a transition to the mature stage of Schuon's esoteric theory and the exposition of the *religio perennis*.[243] Indeed, Schuon understood "the domain of Mary, the Virgin Mother," to be on a level where separate religious "*systems as such lose much of their importance* and where by way of compensation *the essential elements they have in common are affirmed*, *elements which, whether one likes it or not, give the systems*

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[240] Ibid., October 1980, 2 (underline original).

[241] Ibid., December 1980, 2 (underline original, emphasis mine).

[242] Ibid.

[243] This transition was marked by the 1965 publication of his essay "*Religio perennis*" (included in *Regards sur les mondes anciens* 1967), which exposited the "formless essence" underlying all religion "where the extrinsic antinomies of dogma are explained and resolved." Schuon, *Light*, 125. See Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon*, 76.

all their value […]."[244] Besides belonging to "the proto-Semitic world," this "new form" of

the Virgin is, according to Schuon, "a form that in a certain way *includes India* […];" as

such, it "*rises above all theological and liturgical particularization.*"[245] Thus, Schuon often

equates the Virgin with the "incarnation of divine Femininity"[246] and its Hindu

manifestation, the "Supreme *Shakti*,"[247] which precedes all forms and "overflows upon them

all, embraces them all, and reintegrates them all."[248]

In a letter explaining the characteristics of his "Aryanism," a particular aspect

mentioned by Schuon is "the cult of Divine Femininity" along with "the fine arts, namely the

representation of living creatures and consequently the worship of images." "All this,"

Schuon notes, "has been persevered in the highest degree in the Hindu civilization […]; and

we find these same characteristics with the proto-Europeans […]."[249] Here, Schuon's

mention of "the cult of Divine Femininity" and "the fine arts" in relationship to "Hindu

civilization" is not coincidental. As part of Schuon's new spiritual relationship with the

Virgin Mary, he began to paint her partially or totally naked.[250] Schuon related these images

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[244] Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 87-88 (emphasis mine).

[245] Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters," December 1980, 2 (emphasis mine).

[246] Schuon, *The Fullness of God*, 137.

[247] Schuon, *Form and Substance*, 118.

[248] Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 88.

[249] Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters," January 1981, 4. Also included in this list is an identification with the divinity of nature and nature symbolism as reflected in polytheistic mythology and "pantheism." Such ideas remarkably perpetuate explicit nineteenth century Aryanist conceits regarding what proto-Aryans were thought to have believed. See Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 95, 103-04, 122. Schuon also states in a previous letter that as "the messenger" who brought the *ṭarīqa* to Europe, he was "more a proto-Aryan than a European." Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters," December 1980, 2.

[250] For a selection of Schuon's naked Virgin paintings, see Frithjof Schuon, *Images of Primordial and Mystic Beauty: Paintings by Frithjof Schuon* (Bloomington: Abodes, 1992), 231-277. This collection is divided into the following sections: "Red Indian World," "Miscellaneous," "Yogini and Devi," and "Celestial Virgin." Although the majority of the paintings in this volume are of fully naked women depicted without pubic hair, all of the

of the Virgin to Hinduism: "*In my paintings of the Virgin a tendency towards Hinduism, towards Shaktism if you will, manifests itself* […]."[251] Moreover, Schuon theorized this distinctive genre as "sacred nudity," which he equated with "a return to the essence" as he states in an interview: "It is said, in India, that nudity favors the irradiation of spiritual influences […]. In an altogether general way, *nudity expresses—and virtually actualizes—a return to the essence, the origin, the archetype, thus to the celestial state* […]."[252] Thus, returning to the letter above in which Schuon notes that the new esoteric form of the Holy Virgin "*includes India*," Schuon continues:

> And here we touch once again upon *the mystery of sacred nudity*; *for dress is form, or particularity*, at least in the respect considered here. If the protecting mantle is an essential component of the Holy Virgin, then this holds true for her long, down-streaming hair as well, for this is her natural mantle.[253]

It is thus through this imagery of "sacred nudity" and the above notion of the Virgin as "corresponding directly to esoterism" and "*above all theological and liturgical particularization*," that Schuon's distinction between the *religio perennis* as "the body" and the *religio formalis* as "the garment" is made explicitly clear.

In the same letter where Schuon notes that the unique esoteric perspective of his *ṭarīqa* is in its "metaphysical foundation" in "the Vedānta," Schuon also relates that "our

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"Celestial Virgin" images are partially naked, displaying the breasts only. For an example of a fully naked Virgin by Schuon (also without pubic hair) see: Mark Koslow, "Frithjof Schuon: Child molestation and Obstruction of Justice," <http://www.naturesrights.com/knowledge%20power%20book/frithjof_Schuon.asp>.

[251] Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters," October 1981, 7.

[252] Frithjof Schuon quoted in Oldmeadow, *Frithjof Schuon*, 190. It is worth noting that a similar esoteric notion was popular amongst the German Volkisch Aryanist movement. As George Mosse notes, Volkisch ideologues such as Willibald Hentschel held that external beauty mirrored the beauty of the soul, and as such clothing "alienated man from his body, which was a divine gift, and thus destroyed his inner equilibrium." Indeed, nudism became so popular in the movement that there was a journal entitled *Volkisch Nudism*. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, 116.

[253] Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters," December 1980, 2 (emphasis mine).

point of departure is the quest after esoterism and not after a particular religion; after the pure and total Truth, not after a sentimental mythology." In seemingly direct relation to this statement, Schuon further on states that while "Shankara is altogether clear and unambiguous; *Ibn 'Arabī, on the contrary, is uneven, tortuous, obscure and ambiguous*, despite all his merits. *Quite generally we recognize in Hinduism the great resonance of the primordial religion* […]." As such, Schuon asserts that "we take our stand on Shankarāchārya, not on an Ibn 'Arabī; *the latter we accept only insofar as we find in him something of the Vedānta*."[254]

In order to find in Ibn 'Arabi "something of the Vedānta," Schuon takes recourse in the Virgin Mary. In his 1975 publication, *Form and Substance in the Religions* (Forme et substance dans les religions), Schuon notes:

> Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, after declaring that his heart "has opened itself to all forms", and that it is "a cloister for monks, a temple of idols, the Kaaba", adds: "I practice the religion of Love"; now it is over this formless religion that, Semitically speaking, Sayyidatna Maryam presides, thus identifying herself with the Supreme *Shakti* […].[255]

In a footnote, Schuon qualifies this statement by noting that while Ibn 'Arabi specifies that the "religion of love" is "Islam," he was "doubtless obliged to do so in order to avoid a charge of heresy, and he could do so in good conscience by understanding the term *islâm* in its direct and universal meaning."[256]

What Schuon thus refers to as "the 'Marian' or 'shaktic' aspect in the path of Ibn Arabi"[257] is an interpretive apparatus that allows Schuon to decouple Ibn 'Arabi from his

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[254] Ibid., May 1981, 6 (emphasis mine).

[255] Schuon, *Form and Substance*, 118.

[256] Ibid., 118n16.

[257] Ibid., 106.

above noted Ashʿarī / Semitic aspect, as reflected both in Schuon's categorization of Ibn ʿArabi's religion as "formless" and in his hackneyed interpretation of Ibn ʿArabi's "denominationalism" as simply lip service "to avoid a charge of heresy." As "the universal *Shakti*" Mary represents for Schuon "the *Sophia Perennis*."[258] Moreover, Schuon notes that "the Marian wisdom is necessarily an expression of Christic wisdom, to which it adds—or from which it extracts—an aspect proper to itself […]."[259] Schuon further notes that the Christic or "Isan wisdom manifests first of all its agreement with the 'antecedent', hence primordial and underlying, Truth—the *Religio perennis* […]."[260]

Thus, the Mary/ Christ, or in Schuonian terms the Shakti/ Avatara manifestation, is a personification for Schuon of the Perennial wisdom/ religion.[261] Moreover, in this relationship, Schuon considers the Virgin as an embodiment of "the feminine aspect of the *Logos*."[262] As such, it is not insignificant that in the context of Ibn ʿArabi, who is famous for his self-identification as the preeminent manifestation of the Muhammadan *Logos* (i.e., *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*)—the esoteric nature of which Schuon himself had written in detail[263]—that Schuon should choose to associate Ibn ʿArabi with the *logoic* identity of Mary instead.[264]

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[258] Schuon, *Form and Substance*, 115n11.

[259] Ibid., 121.

[260] Ibid., 104.

[261] Schuon notes: "Brahmanically speaking, an avataric woman is necessarily the *Shakti* of an *Avatâra*; thus she […]." Ibid., 120.

[262] Schuon, *The Fullness of God*, 170.

[263] His early works on Islam, such as his 1961 *Understanding Islam* (Comprendre l'islam), show Schuon's knowledge and willing esoteric appropriation of the concept. Moreover, as Nasr points out, his later article "The Spiritual Significance of the Substance of the Prophet" "reveals a very rare intimacy with *al-haqīqat al-muhammadiyyah*." Nasr, "Frithjof Schuon," 263. See Frithjof Schuon, "The Spiritual Significance of the

Indeed, in the same letter that Schuon notes that he can accept only a Vedantic Ibn 'Arabi, Schuon states:

> *The peculiarity of Muhammad is to be the synthesis of all spiritual possibilities; this makes his image, as seen from without, somewhat unintelligible*, compared with the formal unequivocalness of other prophets […]. *Christ represented quite unequivocally—in relation to the Jewish cult of the Law—spiritual inwardness*; and therefore he has this meaning for the Sufis also; he is the Prophet of the Heart, not of outward works; and Mary has the same meaning, with this difference that she founded no religion and is "Mother of All the Prophets", hence well-spring of all the religions. […W]here Maryam is, there shines 'Isā also; precisely because of the mystery of inwardness.[265]

Here, Muhammad's "somewhat unintelligible" image due to his "many-sidedness" is significantly similar to Ibn 'Arabi's "obscure and ambiguous" nature, which as we have seen above is due to his "confusion" between the exoteric and esoteric. Indeed, as we recall, Schuon similarly asserted that Muhammad ultimately remains "*wholly Semitic in style*," because of his attachment to the contingencies of the world, while Christ was according to Schuon, "an 'Aryan god,'" and as such exhibited the "Aryan quality" of being independent "toward forms"—a quality that Schuon further describes as "seemingly 'Greek' or 'Hindu.'"[266]

As was shown above, Schuon followed his predecessors Renan and Chamberlain in claiming that Christ as "*the great prophet of inwardness* […] *presupposed a spiritual suppleness more fitting of India than Judea*."[267] Indeed, elsewhere Schuon specifically

Substance of the Prophet," in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York : Crossroad, 1987), 48-63.

[264] Indeed, as the special Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, Jesus himself comes under his authority. See Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ʿArabī*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 121, 125; and Addas, *Quest*, 157.

[265] Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters," May 1981, 6-7 (emphasis mine).

[266] Schuon, *Form and Substance*, 24n19 (emphasis mine).

[267] Schuon, *Form and Substance*, 228 (emphasis mine).

couples Christ and the Virgin as personifying the "seal of sanctity" and "primordial sanctity" respectively in direct opposition to a metaphysics that is conditioned by exoteric law; Schuon thus asserts: "now sanctity is essentially inwardness […]."[268]

In asserting that Ibn 'Arabi's "religion of love" is directly connected to the Virgin Mary, Schuon simultaneously *de-Semitize*s and *Aryanizes* Ibn 'Arabi. In her nakedness, the Virgin personifies for Schuon the underlying essence of reality, "the nature of things," and thus pure esotericism beyond form—"*for dress is form*," as Schuon notes above. Indeed, Schuon's frustration with Ibn 'Arabi, as we have seen, was his attachment to "ordinary theology," i.e., the "Semitic theology" of Ashʿarism and its heteronomous reliance on revelation and dependence on the will of a transcendent God.

Schuon's movement away from the *religio formalis* as "the garment" to the *religio perennis* as "the body," is a movement toward the *underlying* essence of things, the "Primordial Doctrine," with which Schuon associated his *ṭarīqa*.[269] Schuon's metaphysics of "sacred nudity" as a "*return to the essence, the origin, the archetype,* [and] *thus to the celestial state*," seeks a return to "the Golden Age" before, as Schuon notes above, "the Semitic religions" found it "necessary *to clothe* [the truth] in an argument *efficacious for certain mentalities* […]."[270] Decoupling Ibn 'Arabi from Muhammad and his "Semitic style" and attaching him to the naked Virgin effectively denudes Ibn 'Arabi of his "confused" Semitic attachments and finds in him a pure Aryan objectivity, i.e., the Vedanta.

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[268] Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 86-87.

[269] "In its kernel the Tarīqah is nothing other than the Primordial Doctrine […]." Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters," January 1983, 10 (underline original).

[270] Schuon, *Islam*, 146 (emphasis mine).

The Underlying Racism of the Underlying Religion

Sedgwick has argued that Schuon's universalism, although present in the beginning of his career, developed over time out of a more or less "orthodox" Islamic perspective—a "deviation" marked by an increasingly forceful critique of Islam and turn towards a universal esotericism with features of a "new religious movement."[271] More recently, however, Renaud Fabbri has apologetically argued that because of Schuon's "function" as "the paracletic spokesman of the *sophia perennis*," his universalist position has necessarily been consistent from the beginning, thus marking the "underlying continuity in his personality."[272] In a letter written in 1981, Schuon seems to confirm, at least in part, Sedgwick's position. Here he divides the history of "the *Tarīqah*" into three phases, the first lasting until 1942 was characterized by "the spell of Guénon and also *the psychic atmosphere of exoteric Islam* […]."[273] Although Sedgwick dates Schuon's self-estrangement from Islam as late as 1978,[274] it is significant that Schuon's major discursive production did not begin until the start of his "second phase" after 1942 in which he notes that the "spell" of exoteric Islam "was broken." While this phase was marked by the "descent of the Themes"[275] and "a certain barakah stemming from Hinduism and the American Indians […]," it was also, according to Schuon, a liberation from an

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[271] See Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 90, 147, 170.

[272] Renaud Fabbri, "The Milk of the Virgin: The Prophet, the Saint and the Sage," *Sacred Web* 20 (2007): 265, 239.

[273] Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters," October 1981, 7 (emphasis mine).

[274] See Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 170.

[275] This refers to the "Six Themes of Meditation" (i.e., Death and Life, Repose and Action, and Knowledge and Being), which Schuon "received" after he had received a vision through which he became certain that had become a full Shaykh. The Themes marked Schuon's offshoot from the Algerian Alawiyya by a distinctive practice. By the second phase, the Schuonian Alawiyya had *zawiyas* in Basel, Amiens, and Paris. See Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 90-92.

increasingly unbearable prejudice that would see in me nothing more than the tool of Guénon and the commentator of Ibn ʻArabī; that would even make of me a champion of the Islamic faith and pseudo-esoteric Mahdism. Whereas we had been seeking esoterism![276]

The third phase began, according to Schuon, in 1965 and "the coming of the Holy Virgin" and "the fact that, proceeding from an inner vision, I painted the Virgin and wrote Arabic poems, or rather prayers, to her […]."[277]

Yet, setting aside its hagiographic flourishes, Fabbri's above assertion also points out a certain reality in terms of a continuity in Schuon's esoteric thought. In a 1932 letter, just prior to his conversion (and thus before the three phases above), Schuon confessed his hesitations regarding Islam to a friend in language strikingly similar to his later work:

> [H]ow could you think that I would wish to come to God "through Mecca," *and thereby betray Christ and the Vedanta?* […] Do I have to explain to you once again *that either we are esoterists and metaphysicians who transcend forms*—just as Christ walked over the waters—and who make no distinction between Allah and Brahma, *or else we are exoterists, "theologians"— or at best mystics—who consequently live in forms like fish in water*, and who make a distinction between Mecca and Benares?[278]

Indeed, Schuon's first published article was written soon after the above statements in Mostaganem, Algeria during his one-time visit to Shaykh Al-ʻAlawī in 1933. Entitled "The Ternary Aspect of the Monotheistic Tradition" (L'aspect ternaire de la tradition monothéiste) and published in *Le voile d'Isis*, it "evoked, for the first time, the notion of the 'essential and transcendent unity' of the three monotheistic religions."[279] This article would eventually become the sixth chapter in what has been called "his first major doctrinal book,"[280] *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*.

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[276] Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters," October 1981, 7.

[277] Ibid.

[278] Frithjof Schuon quoted in Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon*, 16.

[279] Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon*, 20.

[280] Nasr, "Frithjof Schuon," 267.

It is thus in Schuon's most iconic work that he first laid out what he understood to be the proper objective perspective through which Ibn 'Arabi should be received. Schuon begins by discussing "the universality of religion," which he notes,

> is clouded over by all sorts of historical and geographical contingencies, so much so that certain people freely doubt its existence; for instance, we have heard it disputed somewhere that Sufism admits this idea, and it has been argued that Muḥyi 'd-Din ibn 'Arabī denied it when he wrote that Islam was the pivot of the other religions.[281]

"The truth is, however," Schuon continues, "that every religious form is superior to the others in a particular respect, and it is this characteristic that in fact indicates the sufficient reason for the existence of the form."[282] Schuon goes on to claim that "this point of view finds its prototype in the Koran itself; in one place the Koran says that all the Prophets are equal, while elsewhere it declares that some are superior to others."[283] Schuon then notes that this latter Qur'anic declaration (i.e., 2:253, 17:55) is interpreted by Ibn 'Arabi to mean "*that each Prophet is superior to the others* by reason of a particularity that is peculiar to him […]."[284] While it is not entirely clear what text Schuon based this innovative interpretation on,[285] such an ostensible reading of Ibn 'Arabi is an early example of Schuon's "principle of

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[281] Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity*, 35. Schuon here is most likely referring to Ivan Aguéli's conception of Ibn 'Arabi and Islam. Schuon quotes Aguéli's article entitled "L'universalité en l'Islam" in several places (e.g., Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity*, 157-58; and *Sufism*, 88) and also refers to Balyānī's *Risālat al-aḥadiyya* repeatedly, which Aguéli wrongly attributed to Ibn 'Arabi and translated, originally published in three parts in *La Gnose* 6, 7, 8 (1911): 168-174; 199-202; 217-223. See Abdul-Hâdi (John Gustav Agelii, dit Ivan Aguéli), *Ecrits pour La Gnose: comprenant la traduction de l'arabe du Traité de l'Unité* (Milano: Archè, 1988), 107-133. Regarding the misattribution of Balyānī's text, see chapter 2, p. 94n12.

[282] Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity*, 35-36.

[283] Ibid. (emphasis mine). Certain verses in the Qur'an attest to the equality of the prophets (e.g., Qur'an 3:84, 42:13, 10:47, 41:43, 5:48, 2:62), while other verses declare that some were superior to others (e.g., Qur'an 2:253, 17:55).

[284] Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity*, 36 (emphasis mine).

[285] Schuon's interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi here is either based on Ibn 'Arabi's commentary on these verses in the *Fuṣūṣ* as discussed below or alternatively on 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Qāshānī's commentary misattributed to Ibn 'Arabi. Indeed, Nasr notes that Qāshānī's commentary was a favorite of Schuon's. Nasr, "Frithjof Schuon," 263. Although Qāshānī acknowledges unique prophetic typologies and archetypal missions, he also maintained

relativity" above and his "Copernican turn" as discussed in chapter 2. Here, Schuon's novel heliocentric prophetology, which treats each prophetic tradition as an independent solar system, replaces Ibn 'Arabi's premodern, geocentric model where all of the prophets orbit around Muhammad at the center.

Yet, in contradistinction to Schuon's claim of prophetic relativity, Ibn 'Arabi offers a much more hierarchical interpretation of these Qur'anic verses (i.e., 2:253, 17:55) in the *Fuṣūṣ*. Here, he notes that each prophetic community is ranked in degree according to their own excellence, while each prophet is ranked with his particular community, thus forming a necessary link between the particular knowledge of a prophet and the needs of his respective community.[286] In a footnote to his translation of this section, Caner Dagli seemingly follows Schuon by noting that "Ibn al-'Arabī is saying that as individuals the prophets also are different from one another, *each possessing certain strengths in relation to the other prophets*."[287] There is no indication in the text, however, that Ibn 'Arabi makes any attempt to relativize prophetic strengths; rather, Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation of these verses appears literal and unequivocally hierarchical.[288] Dagli continues by claiming that the fact that Ibn

a prophetic hierarchy. For example, he attributed to Moses the mission of the unification of the external and the attribute of "the outer" (*al-ẓāhir*) to the Torah, while to Jesus he acknowledged the mission of the unification of the interior and assigned the attribute of "the inner" (*al-bāṭin*) to the Gospel. However, like Ibn 'Arabi, Qāshānī acknowledged what he referred to as the historical "deviations" of Judaism and Christianity, and as such he asserted a traditional prophetic hierarchy with Muhammad at its apex, claiming for him the mission of the unification of the essence and the Qur'anic synthesis of inner and outer through the doctrine of Unity (*al-tawḥīd*). As Pierre Lory notes, for Qāshānī, although all prophetic religions lead to "a single Reality," Islam, and in particular the practice of Sufism, is the only path that gives "access to complete spiritual realization." See Pierre Lory, *Les Commentaires ésotériques du Coran d'après 'Abd al-Razzâq al-Qâshânî* (Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1980), 148, 135-153.

[286] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 132.

[287] Caner K. Dagli, trans, *The Ringstones of Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*), by Ibn Al-ʿArabī (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2004), 148n6.

[288] Indeed, Ibn 'Arabi goes on to quote Qur'an 16:71: "*And God has preferred some of you over others in sustenance*."

'Arabi discerns "a different wisdom in each of the prophets" in the *Fuṣūṣ* indicates that he "sees something special in each of them."[289] While one could hardly argue with this truism, it neglects to underscore the entire *raison d'être* of the *Fuṣūṣ* itself, which as mentioned in chapter 1 is to situate each individual prophet as a "word" (*kalima*) within "the comprehensive words (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*)" of Muhammad, both spiritually and physically, i.e., as the *logoic* Muhammadan Reality (*ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*) and as "the Seal of the prophets." This sentiment is repeated several times by Ibn 'Arabi in the *Fuṣūṣ*,[290] but perhaps most fittingly summarized in the first passage of the chapter on Muhammad:

> His wisdom is that of singularity because he is the most complete creation of the human race. Thus, this affair begins and is sealed by him: he was a prophet when Adam was between water and clay, and then by his elemental birth he became the Seal of the prophets. [...] He was, peace be upon him, the greatest proof of his Lord, for he was given the comprehensive words (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim)*, which were the appellations named by Adam.[291]

Indeed in the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn 'Arabi repeatedly addresses the above issue of prophetic hierarchy in relationship to the unique universality of Muhammad, thus marking his superiority and necessitating obedience to him after his physical manifestation. For example, Ibn 'Arabi states:

> Each prophet was only sent specifically to designated people because each one has a precisely suited disposition (for a particular group). However, Muhammad, blessings and peace be upon him, was sent by God with a universal message to all of humanity in its entirety. He only received the like of this message because he has a universal disposition that encompasses the disposition of every prophet and messenger. Indeed, he has the most balanced and perfect of dispositions and the most upright compositions. […] You know the degree of your low standing compared to the composition of Muhammad, blessings and peace be upon him, in knowledge of his Lord. So, adhere to faith, follow him, and make him your leader![292]

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[289] Dagli, *The Ringstones of Wisdom*, 148n6.

[290] E.g., Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 63-64.

[291] Ibid., 214.

[292] Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2004), 287-88 (Fut. III, 251).

Elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn ʻArabi unequivocally equates Muhammad's universality with his supersessional "preeminence" over all of the former prophets:

> And if Muhammad, blessings and peace be upon him, had been sent during the time of Adam, the prophets and all of humanity would be physically under the ruling (*ḥukm*) of his revealed law (*sharīʻa*) until the Day of Resurrection. Thus, no one (of the prophets) has been sent universally except for him, so he is the king (*al-malik*) and the master (*al-sayyid*). Every messenger besides him was sent to specific people, thus not one of the messages of the messengers except his, blessings and peace be upon him, was universal. Muhammad's kingdom spans from the time of Adam, peace be upon him, to the time when he was sent, blessings and peace be upon him, until the Day of Resurrection. And his preeminence (*taqaddum*) and lordship (*sīyāda*) in the Hereafter over all the messengers is specified in the authentic traditions (*al-ṣaḥīḥ*).[293]

In addition to Schuon's admonishment of Ibn ʻArabi's declarations of Muhammad's superiority over other prophets and exclusive claim to the religion of love, as noted above, Schuon elsewhere spurns similar arguments regarding the superiority of Muhammad and the universality (and thus supersession) of his religion over all others. While "self-evident in Islam," such a "dogmatic assertion," according to Schuon, is simply the acknowledgement that Muhammad is the personification of the *Logos* in its entirety, but (as Schuon similarly implies in *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* above), "the same can be said of every other Messenger within the framework of his own Message" and thus "every integral religion necessarily possesses such an incomparable quality, for *otherwise it would not exist*."[294] Thus, Schuon assures us that if Ibn ʻArabi did make statements apparently holding to the exclusivity of Islam, this is simply because he was obliged to do so since he "belonged to the Islamic civilization and owed his spiritual realization to the Islamic *barakah* and the Masters of Sufism, in a word, to the Islamic form of religion."[295]

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[293] Ibid., vol. 1, 170. (Fut. I, 135).

[294] Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 98-99.

[295] Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity*, 36.

While Schuon's "generous" reading of Ibn 'Arabi appears to be infinitely more inclusive that the Andalusian Sufi's own arguments for the superiority of the Muhammadan *Logos* and Islam, a closer and contextualized reading of Schuon's position proves otherwise. Schuon rejects Ibn 'Arabi's Islamic conception of one universal religion with Muhammad at its center, not on metaphysical grounds, *but on ethno-racial ones*. While Schuon concedes that it is possible to conceive "that there might be only one Revelation or Tradition for our human world," he argues that such an assertion is in actuality "a failure to understand that what determines the difference among forms of Truth is the difference among human receptacles."[296] While this conception of diversity looks very similar to Ibn 'Arabi's assertion above that the knowledge of a prophet is based on the need of the particular community that he is sent to, Schuon adds a spirituo-racial component:

> For thousands of years humanity has been divided into several fundamentally different branches constituting as many complete humanities, more or less closed in on themselves; the existence of spiritual receptacles so different and so original demands a differentiated refraction of the one Truth. Let us note that this *is not always a question of race, but more often of human groups*, very diverse perhaps, but nonetheless *subject to mental conditions* which, taken as a whole, *make of them sufficiently homogeneous spiritual recipients* […].[297]

Importantly, Schuon understood differences between "human groups" *not solely* in the context of race, but more completely in a context of "natural castes."[298] As he states above,

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[296] Schuon, *Gnosis*, 17 (emphasis mine).

[297] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[298] In *Castes and Races*, Schuon seeks to spiritualize the concept of race in terms of a metaphysical idea of caste based on spiritual disposition of typologies rather than blood. Such typologies can be found in "pure" blood groups, but not necessarily. Schuon thus notes: "In order to understand the meaning of races one must first of all realize that they are derived from fundamental aspects of humanity and not from something fortuitous in nature. If racialism is something to be rejected, so is an anti-racialism which errs in the opposite direction by attributing racial difference to merely accidental causes […] What is never understood by those who have a passion for racial purity is that *there is a greater qualitative difference between the psychic heredity of different natural castes* - even if the race be the same - than between that of members of the same caste of differing race; fundamental and personal tendencies have more importance than racial modes, at any rate so far as the major races or healthy branches of these are concerned, though not degenerate groups." Schuon, *Castes and Races*, 39-40.

225

each "human group" has a particular "mental condition" that makes them "sufficiently homogeneous." Thus, as was previously noted, Schuon directly asserts in *Castes and Races* that "*a revelation always conforms to a racial genius*, though this by no means signifies that it is restricted to the specific limits of the race in question."[299] Thus, Schuon forcefully echoes the discourse of his nineteenth century predecessors. As Kidd notes, "Just as racialists ascribed distinctive intellectual qualities (or failings) to particular races, so they also associated particular racial groups with certain spiritual characteristics."[300] Schuon thus continues the passage above:

> This being so, we can say that *the diverse Revelations do not really contradict one another since they do not apply to the same receptacle* and since God never addresses the same message to two or more receptacles having a divergent character, that is, corresponding analogically to dimensions that are formally incompatible; *a contradiction can arise only between things situated on the same level*. The apparent antinomies between Traditions are like differences of language or symbol; *contradictions are an aspect of the human receptacles, not of God*; diversity in the world *is a result of its remoteness from the divine Principle* […].[301]

Indeed, let us also recall that Schuon noted that after "the Golden Age," the Semitic religions were forced "to clothe [the truth] *in an argument efficacious for certain mentalities*." Like Gobineau and Chamberlain who, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, held that German blood was bound by a racial soul, Schuon similarly notes that there is "*a fundamental tendency in the Gospel that responds with particular force to the needs of the Germanic soul: namely, a tendency toward simplicity and inwardness, hence away from theological and liturgical complication, [and] formalism* […]."[302] Indeed, in a similar vain,

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[299] Schuon, *Castes and Races*, 42n30 (emphasis mine).

[300] Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 171.

[301] Schuon, *Gnosis*, 17 (emphasis mine).

[302] Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 28 (emphasis mine).

Schuon argued that the idea of a single universal religion (as Ibn 'Arabi claims for Islam above) was in fact "*contrary to the nature of things* […]."[303] This is so, he argues, because

> *the ethnic diversity of humanity* and the geographical extent of the earth suffice to render highly unlikely the axiom of one unique religion for all and on the contrary highly likely—to say the least—*the need for a plurality of religions*; in other words the idea of a single religion does not escape contradiction if one takes account of its claims to absoluteness and universality, on the one hand, and *the psychological and physical impossibility of their realization*, on the other, not to mention the antinomy between such claims and the necessarily relative character of all religious mythology; *only pure metaphysics and pure prayer are absolute and therefore universal*. As for "mythology",[304] it is indispensable—apart from its intrinsic content of truth and efficacy—for enabling metaphysical and essential truth to "gain a footing" in a given human collectivity.[305]

In light of the above, it would seem that Schuon's conception of the "transcendent unity of religions" is ironically based on a less obvious foundation—that of "the ethnic diversity of humanity." According to Schuon, such diversity makes religious pluralism necessary, not because of the inherent "good" of plurality in itself, but because human spirituo-racial difference makes the acceptance of a single exoteric religion an impossibility, i.e., certain spirituo-racial dispositions, such as "the German soul," are in need of more esoteric religions, such as Christianity. Yet here we encounter a second irony: while Schuon claims "*the idea of a single religion does not escape contradiction if one takes account of its claims to absoluteness and universality*," he also claims that "*only pure metaphysics and pure prayer are absolute and therefore universal*."

Although, as noted above, Schuon claimed that Islam formed "the providential ground" for his manifestation of "*the supra formal nature of spiritual Truth*," he clearly

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[303] Schuon, *Gnosis*, 20 (emphasis mine).

[304] Schuon later notes that "'outwardly' the religions are 'mythologies' or, more precisely, symbolisms designed for different human receptacles and displaying by their limitations, not a contradiction *in divinis*, but on the contrary a mercy." Ibid., 63.

[305] Ibid., 20 (emphasis mine).

rejects Ibn 'Arabi's recourse to Muhammad as a universal prophet. As Schuon importantly

notes in *Logic and Transcendence*, "[a]ccording to Islam," Muhammad is the synthesis of all

of the prophets "since he is thus the first in his celestial reality he is the last in time,

according to the principle of inverse reflection." Although Muhammad's synthesis is thus

taken as a "unique and supereminent quality" by Muslims, according to Schuon, it is in

reality "quite contingent" and "*entirely in line with henotheist logic*, for it is in just the same

way—because of a given quality shared with the Absolute—that Vishnu, Shiva, or other

divinities become alternatively or separately the supreme God."[306] Citing Müller's

employment of this term as "a cult involving several divinities, each of whom is looked upon

as the supreme God while it is worshiped,"[307] Schuon thus argues that Muhammad's

supremacy is relative to his specific sphere of *logoic* influence, or what Schuon here calls his

"cosmic sector." Yet, importantly, Schuon argues:

> Just as the chronological posteriority of the Arab Prophet may—or must—be interpreted in
> the cosmic sector of Islam as marking the principial anteriority of the Muhammadan *Logos*,
> so the human femininity of the Blessed Virgin, hence her subordination, can indicate a real
> celestial superiority in a particular connection: given the spiritual and cosmic supereminence
> of the personage, femininity appears in this case as the inverted reflection of pure essentiality,
> which amounts to saying that in her "transcendent body" (*dharmakāya*) the Virgin is the
> virginal Mother of all the Prophets; she is thus identified with divine Femininity or the
> Wisdom that was "in the beginning".[308]

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[306] Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, 100 (emphasis mine).

[307] Schuon cites Müller as the originator of the term "henotheism" and notes that while it is still "alive" in
Hinduism, "the henotheist mentality is characteristic of the entire East to one degree or another." Schuon, *Logic
and Transcendence*, 99, 100. The term "henotheism" was first used by Friedrich Schelling (d. 1854) in his study
of mythology to designate a "rudimentary monotheism." It was later popularized by Müller as a "belief in single
gods"—a particular form of polytheism characteristic of the gods in the Rigveda. As opposed to the hierarchical
polytheism of ancient Greece and Rome, henotheism was characterized by the worship of a plurality of gods,
each representing the absolute and thus not constrained by the powers of other gods. Müller theorized that
henotheistic phase was the global precursor to both polytheistic and monotheistic modes of worship. See
Michiko Yusa, "Henotheism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., vol. 6 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA,
2005), 3913-3914.

[308] Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, 101.

Here, it is clear that Schuon finds in the "pure essentiality" of the Virgin Mary a higher

"celestial supremacy" even more anterior to Muhammad, since she is his "virginal Mother."

Although, as noted above, Ibn 'Arabi situated himself decidedly within the Muhammadan

Logos as its preeminent manifestation, Schuon chooses instead to situate Ibn 'Arabi within

the "cosmic sector" of the Virgin, thus taking him outside of the "mythology" of Islam.

In *Sufism*, Schuon refers to an iconic passage in the *Fuṣūṣ* dealing with Ibn 'Arabi's

famous concept of "the divinity of beliefs" (*al-ilāh al-muʿtaqad*).[309] Here, Schuon asserts that

"[a]mong the statements made by Ibn Arabi" it is "*the one most directly in conformity with*

the esoteric perspective [...]."[310] Although Schuon quotes a longer section from the final

chapter on Muhammad in the *Fuṣūṣ*, the thrust of his commentary revolves around the

following passage:

> The believer . . . praises only the Divinity contained within his belief [...]. The Divinity in
> whom one believes is (so to speak) fashioned by him who conceives (*nādhir*), and it is
> therefore (in this respect) his work; the praise addressed to what he believes is praise
> addressed (indirectly and with regard to conceptualization) to himself.[311]

Schuon thus notes that "[i]t is important to understand here that the image of the 'believer

who praises himself' must be applied above all, *according to the logic of things*, to a given

religious point of view and therefore *to a given collectivity*."[312]

Yet, like Michael Sells's treatment of Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on belief discussed in

chapter 1, Schuon's slide from theological "belief" to religious "collectivity" is here

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[309] This is another rendition of *al-ilāh fī al-iʿtiqādāt* as Ibn 'Arabi uses in the chapter of Muhammad, which Schuon quotes from here. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 225-6. For a discussion of Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on belief see chapter 1, pp. 42-48.

[310] Schuon, *Sufism*, 40.

[311] Ibn 'Arabi quoted in Schuon, *Sufism*, 40. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 226.

[312] Schuon, *Sufism*, 41 (emphasis mine).

229

discursively more aligned with "the logic" of secular modernity, which tends to construe religion as an internal "set of beliefs" rather than obligatory observance of law and disciplined practice. Such a modern distinction is especially apparent when contrasted to the premodern "logic" of Ibn 'Arabi's definition of "religion" as "obedience" (*inqiyād*) to revealed law.[313] Nevertheless, Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on belief has been directly associated with Schuon's universalist schema itself. For example, Eric Geoffroy recently notes that it was "Ibn 'Arabī who furnished a doctrinal framework for the concept of the 'transcendent unity of religions' […]. To him, *all beliefs, and therefore all religions, are true because each is a response to the manifestation of a divine Name* […]."[314] Such a summary of Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on belief through the lens of Schuon's emblematic idea evinces a now commonplace reduction of both "doctrines" to a democratized discourse of religious pluralism. Yet, as was noted above, rather than understanding all religions as "true" in an absolute sense, Schuon understood religions as only relatively true, i.e., as "mythology" designed "for enabling metaphysical and essential truth." Indeed, Schuon uses Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on belief *to relativize all religions except for that of esotericism*, which he claims "alone is absolutely monotheistic." Here, concluding his discussion of Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on belief, which as noted above Schuon claimed as "*directly in conformity with the esoteric perspective*," he states:

> It follows from these considerations that God is the same for all the religions only in the divine "stratosphere", not in the human "atmosphere"; in this "atmosphere" each religion has its own God for all practical purposes, *and there are as many Gods as there are religions*. In

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[313] As noted in chapter 1, this definition as articulated by Ibn 'Arabi in the *Fuṣūṣ* parallels the original Latin term *religio* and its notion of being bound (from *religare*) to God in terms of obligation or duty. See chapter 1, p. 46n79.

[314] Eric Geoffroy, *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2010), 184.

this sense it could be said *that esoterism alone is absolutely monotheistic*, it alone recognizing only one religion under diverse forms.[315]

Indeed, Schuon thus appropriates Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on belief in the service of what he described in *Logic and Transcendence* above as a "henotheistic logic," i.e., a representative "Hindu" doctrine of many gods that relativizes all notions of divine supereminence within a wider esoteric cosmology of competing "cosmic sectors." In such a henotheistic cosmology, Ibn 'Arabi's identification with the Qur'anic dispensation and the Muhammadan *Logos* as the universal prophetic synthesis[316] is transmogrified into an identification with "esoterism alone" as the only "absolutely monotheistic" path. As was shown above, in *Logic and Transcendence*, this uniquely monotheistic esotericism is personified by none other than the "*celestial superiority*" of the "the virginal Mother of all the Prophets" whose "*spiritual and cosmic supereminence*" is posited as even more essential than that of "the principial anteriority of the Muhammadan *Logos*."[317]

Conclusion

As the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood (*khātam al-walāya al-muḥammadiyya*) and the principle manifestation of the Muhammadan Reality on earth,[318] Ibn 'Arabi took the cosmological *and* historical superiority of the Prophet as seriously as he took the purity of his

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[315] Schuon, *Sufism*, 41 (emphasis mine).

[316] I.e., as having been given "the comprehensive words" (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*). In the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn 'Arabi specifically relates the *jawāmiʿ al-kalim* to "the station of Muhammad." See Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 5, 164 (Fut. III, 142).

[317] Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, 101 (emphasis mine).

[318] As Chodkiewicz notes, Ibn 'Arabi understood his function as the Muhammadan Seal to be the historical manifestation of "the most inward and most fundamental aspect of the Muḥammadan Reality which is the source of all *walāya* […]." Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 125.

own Arab pedigree; indeed, his esoteric "vocation" depended on them both.[319] As noted in chapter 1, Ibn ʿArabi explains in the *Futūḥāt* that the "spiritual presence (*rūḥāniyya*)" of Muhammad "was with each prophet and messenger" during their prophethood; even though each revealed law is associated with its particular prophet, "in reality, each is the revealed law of Muhammad (*sharʿ muḥammad*)." Yet, although these revealed laws (*sharāʾiʿ*) were not separate from Muhammad's, when Muhammad manifested physically "God abrogated (*nasakha*) all of the laws by his law." Thus, Ibn ʿArabi claims: "Muhammad is the ruler (*al-ḥākim*) both in his absence (*ghaiban*) and when witnessed (*shahādatan*)."[320]

While Ibn ʿArabi's portrayal of Muhammad as "ruler" effectively blurs imagined boundaries between his *logoic* essence and his historical person, his intermixing of the so-called "esoteric" and "exoteric" elsewhere is taken by Schuon as evidence of the Andalusian Sufi's confused "contradictions" and lack of a necessary "*objective perspective in an esoteric context*." As was shown above, Schuon's notion of intellectual "objectivity" is synonymous with "*none other than the truth*" in which the subject is far enough removed from its own self to fully merge with its object of awareness. In such an objective state, "*the essential takes precedence over the accidental*"—a state Schuon claims as the natural "prerogative" of the human being. The "esoteric" as the essential substance or "nature of things" is thus superior to the "exoteric," which is in turn "accidental" and ultimately dispensable.

Schuon's discourse thus neatly reflects Kocku von Stuckrad's description of esotericism as "the claim to a wisdom that is superior to other interpretations of cosmos and

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[319] Indeed, Ibn ʿArabi stipulated that the "office of the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood belongs to an Arab, one of the noblest in lineage and power." Ibn ʿArabi quoted in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 117-18.

[320] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 1, 170 (Fut. I, 135).

history."[321] As was noted above, Schuon claimed two kinds of esotericisms, one essential and the other complementary. While essential esotericism was metaphysics itself, esotericisms *qua* complements of religions were partially concealed by "*theological, psychological and legalistic meanders foreign to [their] nature.*" According to Schuon, this is exactly the problem with Sufism, which is an esotericism that is *veiled* by its "subjectivist" attachment to an exoteric religion, i.e., Islam. While such exaltation of the "esoteric" over the "exoteric" is a spiritualization of a rather commonplace post-Kantian valorization of the "interior life" over that of the communal,[322] Schuon's deployment of the Aryan/ Semitic binary as an additional signifier marks a *racialization* of this dialectic.[323] As was noted at the start of this chapter, Schuon faulted Sufism as "more moral than intellectual," which he attributed to the "subjectivist" Semitic sensibility of the "Arab or Muslim." Just as Renan insisted that Judaism could not be comprehended without first understanding the characteristics of the Semitic race,[324] Schuon repeatedly asserts that the quality of the Aryan and Semitic "spirit" is reflected in their respective religions. Schuon thus followed his Aryanist predecessors, such as Chamberlain, in asserting that the "'naturally supernatural' capacity" of Aryan "objectivity" is reflected in the essential metaphysical nature of Vedanta, while Semitic "subjectivity" is mirrored in an essentially moralistic and voluntaristic Islam/ Sufism.

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[321] Kocku von Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," *Religion* 35 (2005): 88.

[322] Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*, 110-11.

[323] As David Theo Goldberg notes, such racialization "involves the structural composition and determination of groups into racialized form, the imparting of racial significance and connotation at specific sociostructural sites to relationships previously lacking them." David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 82.

[324] Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 30.

Schuon's esoteric discourse thus clearly echoes nineteenth century anthropological

explanations of religious phenomena as expressions of racial traits. In such ideological

configurations, as Kidd points out, "[r]ace was not simply a matter of external physical

differences but of deep psychic differences, which manifested themselves in the varieties of

religion found throughout the world." As such, religion came to be seen as simply a

byproduct of race, and "*religious diversity an expression of the deeper underlying truth of

racial differences.*"[325] It is in this sense that Gil Anidjar argues that the early nineteenth

century "invention of religion" cannot be understood as separate from "the invention of

modern racism." Anidjar here claims that the idea of "religion" can be understood as a

strategy "that distributes and separates according to distinct and apparently unrelated grids of

differences, religious differences and ethnic or racial differences." As such "religion and

race," according to Anidjar, "are contemporary, indeed, coextensive and, moreover, co-

concealing categories."[326] Schuon's discourse of the *religio perennis* as a way of objectivity,

which he insists is the "*prerogative of the human state*," is itself juxtaposed with the *religio

formalis* as a subjective veil needed for "certain mentalities" (i.e., Semitic) to accept the

truth. Schuon's path of esotericism as a means to denude the *religio formalis* from the *religio

perennis*, or the exoteric from the esoteric, thus emerges as fully imbricated with a racialist

discourse, i.e., the ridding of the Semitic from the Aryan.

While Schuon clearly understood the general contours of the *logoic* superiority Ibn

'Arabi gave to Muhammad in relation to the other prophets, he chose to openly reject it. In

Muhammad's stead, Schuon imagined another cosmic figure to associate Ibn 'Arabi with,

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[325] Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 171 (emphasis mine).

[326] Anidjar, *Semites*, 27, 28.

234

one that was less encumbered with exoteric trappings, i.e., Mary as "the virginal Mother of all the Prophets." In literally painting this "shaktic" image of Mary as naked, Schuon was able to denude her of her Semitic clothing, i.e., the *religio formalis* of exoteric law and align her with his Aryan vision of the *religio perennis*, pure esotericism beyond Semitic dogma and moralism. In order to bring Ibn 'Arabi fully into a paradigm of pure esoterism, Schuon de-Semitized him by separating him from Muhammad, who was after all "wholly Semitic in style," and replaced him with Mary, and thus Jesus, who for Schuon was an "Aryan god." In Schuon's discourse, Ibn 'Arabi became for all intents and purposes the Seal of Marian Sainthood—a saint more conducive to the Indo-European paradigm of interior and "formless" religion.

Rather than a system that seeks to unite the various religions, Schuon's universalism thus emerges as hegemonic. Discursively based upon one of the most exclusory ideologies known in modern history, it seeks to legitimize its own image, while delegitimizing those Others that threaten to constrain its sovereign knowledge. Schuon's self-identification with "Aryanism" and its attendant mode of "intellection" serves an ideological strategy against heteronomous systems that claim the ability through discursive traditions of law, dogma, deontology, and morality to adjudicate truth and legitimize authority. As such, Schuon's selective reading of Ibn 'Arabi's discourse and subsequent construction of his "Marian" image is a particularly lucid example of what McCutcheon refers to as the "cosmogonic" activity of the "art" of hermeneutics[327]—here, as a discursive strategy used to formulate and sustain a particular regime of knowledge through the ideological deployment of race and religion as two mutually imbricated concepts. Although Schuon claimed that "one cannot

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[327] McCutcheon, *Critics not Caretakers*, 173.

make a 'religion' out of *Advaita Vedânta*,"[328] his Aryan identification with "esotericism alone"—i.e., the *religio perennis*—as "*absolutely monotheistic*" and his concomitant substitution of Mary for Muhammad renders such a distinction merely semantic.

Hugh Nicholson has recently observed that all universalist schemes are inevitably ideological in their attempt to mask their own universalist particularism. Such discourse "declares a radical break with religious exclusivism, but does so only through an act of exclusion that it fails to acknowledge."[329] While Schuon's elucidation of Ibn 'Arabi and the "transcendent unity of religions" has been widely interpreted by *both* supporters and detractors as a discourse that seeks to unify *or* homogenize religious diversity within a purported underlying religious essence, Schuon's own discursive practices evince a much more complex and ironic appropriation of the Andalusian Sufi marked by a universalization of nineteenth century racialist categories as signifiers of Semitic difference in opposition to a single Aryan truth.

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[328] Schuon, *The Fullness of God*, 173-74.

[329] Hugh Nicholson, *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6.

CHAPTER FOUR

WITHIN A KANTIAN LOOKING GLASS:
REASONABLE SUFISM AND THE RISE OF IBN 'ARABI IN THE WESTERN IMAGINARY

The universal must be found everywhere, must be valid for all, and to do this, it must retain a familiar profile, its own.[1]

From the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us and whose crime is not to be.[2]

In a book published in 2008, tellingly entitled *The Other Islam: Sufism and the Road to Global Harmony*, Stephen Schwartz claims Ibn 'Arabi as the earliest example of a "truly European Muslim."[3] According to Schwartz, a journalist and executive director of the Center for Islamic Pluralism (CIP),[4] Ibn 'Arabi's "Spanish Sufism inaugurated a truly European Islam, providing a model for moderate Muslims living in Christian Europe in the twenty-first century."[5] Depicting a global, *intra*-faith confrontation between "fundamentalist and spiritual Muslims," *The Other Islam* posits a particular mode of Sufism "promoting *intellectual and*

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[1] Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 114-5.

[2] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 2005), 178.

[3] Stephen Schwartz, *The Other Islam: Sufism and the Road to Global Harmony* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 90.

[4] CIP is a Washington-based think tank connected with the noted anti-Muslim propagandist Daniel Pipes. For Pipes's acknowledgement of his connection see his blog entry: "Stephen Schwartz and the Center for Islamic Pluralism" *Lion's Den: Daniel Pipes Blog* (March 25, 2005), www.danielpipes.org/blog/2005/03/stephen-schwartz-and-the-center-for-islamic (accessed May 17, 2003). For a review of Pipes's formative connection with institutionalized Islamophobia in American policy see Wajahat Ali, Eli Clifton, Matthew Duss, Lee Fang, Scott Keyes, and Faiz Shakir, *Fear, Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2011), 41-44.

[5] Schwartz, *The Other Islam*, 63.

spiritual liberty" as a strategic ally with the West in a "common battle against Islamist radicalism."[6] On one side "we find *the fanatical creed* of Wahhabism […] at the other we find *the enlightened habits* of Sufism."[7] In support of such totalizing juxtapositions, Schwartz cites a report published in 2007 by the RAND Corporation (a military policy think tank funded primarily by Department of Defense contracts[8]), which categorically states that Sufis are "*natural allies of the West*" and "potential partners for the United States and its friends and allies in the ideological struggle against radical Islamism."[9]

Since the 2007 RAND report, which builds on similar assertions about Sufism in two previous RAND reports published after 9/11,[10] there have been over a dozen articles written in the US and abroad citing RAND's enthusiasm for a Western strategic alliance with Sufism.[11] One of the apparently more influential of such articles was a 2009 *Boston Globe* op-ed piece, written by Philip Jenkins, a professor of history and religious studies at Baylor University.[12] Although Jenkins admits that Sufis—whom he Europeanizes as "the *knights* of

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[6] Schwartz, *The Other Islam*, 29, 245n5 (emphasis mine).

[7] Ibid., 14 (emphasis mine).

[8] David D Newsom, *The Public Dimension of Foreign Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 116.

[9] Angel Rabasa et al., *Building Moderate Muslim Networks* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2007), 73, 3, 70 (emphasis mine). Although not mentioned in *The Other Islam*, the 2007 RAND report directly cites Schwartz as providing "valuable insights on Sufism." See Rabasa, *Building*, xxv.

[10] The 2004 RAND report makes exactly the same "*natural allies of the West*" claim, while the general idea is found throughout the 2003 report. See Angel M. Rabasa et al., *The Muslim World after 9/11* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2004), 23; and Cheryl Benard, *Civil and Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, Strategies* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2003), passim.

[11] For a representative sample of such articles see the following search results for "RAND" in the blog: "Sufi News and Sufism World Report," http://sufinews.blogspot.com/search?q=rand.

[12] This article was recently cited in *God's Century*, a work authored by a group of political scientists through a research initiative funded in part by the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. Using Jenkins's 2009 *Boston Globe* article along with the 2007 RAND report as their sole sources, the authors repeat assertions for Sufism "as a voice of moderation" and "hope for an antidote to extremism." See Monica

238

Islam"—have a history of armed resistance against Western colonialism, today they are "deadly enemies" of "hard-line fundamentalists like the Saudi Wahhabis and the Taliban." Thus, Jenkins states: "To look at Islam without seeing the Sufis is to be ignorant of a *crucial clash of civilizations in today's world*: not the conflict between Islam and the West, but *an epochal struggle within Islam itself*."[13]

Yet Sufis, according to Jenkins, "are much more than tactical allies for the West: they are, potentially, the greatest hope for pluralism and democracy within Muslim nations." After citing the authoritarian governments of Uzbekistan, Syria, and China as examples of successful state use of "tolerant-minded Sufi orders" against "Islamist subversion," Jenkins with no little irony suggests that Western support of the Sufis' "struggle against the fanatics" may "encourage *the growth of a Euro-Islam* that could reconcile easily with modernity and democracy […]." Jenkins's optimistic view of Sufism is based on his repeated assertion of Sufi "*open-mindedness*." While fundamentalists are epistemologically bound "to the pure religion taught by the prophet Muhammad in the seventh century," the Sufis "*cherish intellectual exploration*." Thus Jenkins states that "*Progressive Sufi thinkers* are quite open to modern knowledge and science."[14]

In such discourse as put forth above by Jenkins, Schwartz, and the RAND Corporation, Sufism is constructed as particularly *rational* and *tolerant*—what the initial 2003 RAND report defines as "an *open, intellectual*" and "a more *philosophical, mystical*

Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), 173.

[13] Philip Jenkins, "Mystical Power: Why Sufi Muslims, for centuries the most ferocious soldiers of Islam, could be our most valuable allies in the fight against extremism," *Boston Globe* (January 25, 2009), http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2009/01/25/mystical_power/?page=full (accessed May 16, 2013) emphasis mine.

[14] Jenkins, "Mystical Power," emphasis mine.

interpretation of Islam."[15] Located at the Euro-American nexus of academia, media, and the

state, this discourse—what I refer to in the following chapter as the Western discourse of

"reasonable Sufism"[16]—is depicted in a Manichean struggle with its intra-religious, *fanatical*

Other, or in the words of Jenkins above, a "clash of civilizations […] within Islam itself."

Here, an explicit and "natural" (i.e., *inherent*) connection is made between Sufism and the

modern West that can serve as a model of reformed, "European Islam."

Although certainly part of Mahmood Mamdani's oft-mentioned "good Muslim/bad

Muslim" binary (i.e., "good Muslims are modern, secular, and Westernized, but bad Muslims

are doctrinal, antimodern, and virulent"[17]), in what follows I suggest that the discourse of

reasonable Sufism is *more than simply* a "political" construct disseminated by the state to

discursively enforce secular-liberal subjectivity. While Mamdani's important analysis

focuses upon the post-9/11 "official" American discourse of "good" and "bad" Muslims as a

specific political construction that essentializes cultural and religious identity,[18] this chapter

analyzes the discourse of reasonable Sufism as formed within a Western historical struggle to

(re)define the "essence" of religion in terms of evolving epistemologies and shifting

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[15] Benard, *Civil and Democratic Islam*, 46, 42 n15.

[16] While "reasonable" is here *in part* used to signify "rational," I choose not to use "rational Sufism" to avoid confusing this discourse with that of Fazlur Rahman's "neo-Sufism." Although Rahman clearly states that such discourse, in his view, is "an attitude of moral and religious positivism" (not "rationalism"), it has problematically been dubbed "rational mysticism." See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 209; R. S. O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke, "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered," *Der Islam* 70 (1993): 56n7; and Rosemary R. Hicks, "Comparative Religion and the Cold War Transformation of Indo-Persian 'Mysticism' into Liberal Islamic Modernity," in *Secularism and Religion-Making*, ed. Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal Mandair (Oxford University Press, 2011), 161ff.

[17] Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books 2004), 24.

[18] Mamdani states: "Judgments of 'good' and 'bad' refer to Muslim political identities, not to cultural or religious ones." In such discourse of "official America" post-9/11, rather than referring to any overtly religious or cultural characteristic, such categories "are really quasi-official names for those who support and oppose American policies […]." Mamdani, *Good Muslim*, 15, 260.

constructions of human subjectivity.[19] As Talal Asad points out, although religion is commonly regarded "as alien to the secular," the sociopolitical location of Western secular-liberal subjectivity is *inherently tied* to the production of modern forms of religion and religiosity.[20]

The formation of such secular-liberal religiosity, what David Pacini calls the "modern religion of conscience," is distinctively marked by its break with premodern speculative ontological frameworks. Rather than positing an interior human connection with the divine, the modern religion of conscience rests "on the claim that God 'speaks' to us through directives of a *self-governing conscience* that guide moral conduct."[21] In what follows, I heuristically employ Kant's 1793 work *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* as a particularly formative representation of such autonomous religious subjectivity. As will be discussed below, Kant's *Religion* is less a philosophical argument than a European teleological metanarrative of the modern religion of conscience. I thus argue that "Sufis," and increasingly the contemporary image of Ibn 'Arabi, serve in the discourse of reasonable Sufism as *mirror reflections* of the modern Western religious imaginary. In such discourse, an autonomously rational Sufism—specifically notable for its proximity to Greco-Christian humanism—is framed within a Kantian teleology of universal reason and juxtaposed to an

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[19] This chapter's "post-secular" theoretical engagement expands upon a preliminary study that takes a more "political" approach. See G. A. Lipton, "Secular Sufism: Neoliberalism, Ethnoracism, and the Reformation of the Muslim Other," *The Muslim World* 101 (2011): 427–40.

[20] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003), 193. As Asad elsewhere notes: "Religion has been part of the restructuration of practical times and spaces, a rearticulation of practical knowledges and powers, of subjective behaviors, sensibilities, needs, and expectations in modernity. But that applies equally to secularism, whose function has been to try to guide that rearticulation […]." Talal Asad, "Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith's 'The Meaning and End of Religion,' *History of Religions* 40, no. 3 (2001): 220.

[21] David S Pacini, *Through Narcissus' Glass Darkly: The Modern Religion of Conscience* (New York: Fodrdham University Press, 2008), 4 (emphasis mine).

irrationally heteronomous and Semitic Islam(*ism*). While Kant's intellectual legacy is certainly more nuanced and complex than my focus here can accommodate, his ideas regarding the universal nature of autonomous religious subjectivity are nevertheless connected to significant presuppositions present in his theories of humanity and civilization that have been noted for their Eurocentric racialism and particularism.[22] By interrogating such presuppositions present in the discourse of reasonable Sufism, this chapter aims to track the kinds of religious subjectivities it sanctions and the ideological rhetoric of "conversion" it thereby supports.

Re-Orienting "Mysticism" via "Reasonable" Sufism

In the contemporary study of religion, the term "mysticism" has suffered from the same problems of definition as that of "religion," which as Richard King notes, has been plagued by a scholarly quest "to delineate the precise nature or 'essence' of the phenomena under consideration."[23] Following on the heals of Wilfred Cantwell Smith's groundbreaking 1962 critique of "religion," the past several decades have witnessed a sustained scholarly interrogation of "mysticism" as a universal category.[24] Building on Steven Katz's pioneering constructivist "plea for the recognition of differences" against claims for a universal typology of mystical experience,[25] Wayne Proudfoot analyzed William James's categories of mystical

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[22] E.g., see Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 103-140; and Ian Hunter, "Kant's Regional Cosmopolitanism," *Journal of the History of International Law* 12, no. 2 (2010): 165-188.

[23] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 2002), 8.

[24] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

[25] Steven T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), 25.

experience (as representative of a romantic tradition going back to Friedrich Schleiermacher) to argue that such governing rules actually help to form the nature of mystical experience itself.[26]

Throughout the following decade, Grace Jantzen took the general subject of Proudfoot's study in a Foucauldian direction (and feminist analysis), arguing that the attempt of Schleiermacher and James to sidestep the Kantian strictures on knowledge resulted in a subjectivized construction of mysticism based on states of consciousness and inner experience—as opposed to rational processes.[27] According to Jantzen, this attempt to escape Kant has been formative in modern understandings of mysticism, which have been "depoliticized" and hermetically sealed off from the vagaries of sociohistorical contexts of power, authority, and gender. In such romantic conceptions, mysticism is only a private, subjective experience whose major ingredients include "the annihilation or absorption of the self, the merging into complete unity of subject and object, the intensity of feeling, *and the inadequacy of rationality* […]."[28]

Following Jantzen, Omid Safi has forcefully mobilized a similar critique in terms of the Western study of Islamic mysticism, arguing that the study of Sufism continues to focus on "mystical experience" and understand its subject through a post-Enlightenment, Protestant worldview "in which the realms of 'religion' and 'mysticism' have been privatized *and*

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[26] Proudfoot analyzes James's "primary marks" of mystical experience as articulated in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (i.e., "its ineffability and a noetic quality"). See Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985), 120, 119-154 passim.

[27] Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7, 317. See also Grace M. Jantzen, "Mysticism and Experience," *Religious Studies* 25, no. 3 (1989): 295-315

[28] Jantzen, *Power*, 320 (emphasis mine).

defined in opposition to "rational philosophy."[29] Safi thus interrogates the Western scholarly

adoption of Jamesian categories of experience and privatized religion over social and

institutional aspects of Sufism and shows how in premodern contexts of Persian Sufism

mystical sanctity was intimately tied to social expressions of political power.[30]

In the following chapter, I build upon the important insights offered by Proudfoot,

Jantzen, and Safi, but shift the subject of interrogation away from "experiential-expressivist"

models of mysticism that extol experience and feeling as authentic modes of spirituality in

opposition to rationality.[31] Instead, I focus on a parallel, *and often overlapping*, mode of

contemporary construction of mysticism.[32] Rather than highlighting "feeling," I argue that

this particular construction of Islamic mysticism is distinctive in emphasizing so-called

universal principles of Kantian autonomous reason and morality. In Safi's critique of the use

of Jamesian categories of Sufism as *privatized* and *anti-rational* mysticism cited above, he

specifies the Western academic focus "on the mystical expressions of two *individuals*: the

elaborate metaphysical thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī, and the mystical poetry of Rumi."[33]

Similarly, in the discourse of reasonable Sufism, both Ibn ʿArabi and Rumi are used as

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[29] Omid Safi, "Bargaining with *Baraka:* Persian Sufism, 'Mysticism,' and Pre-modern Politics," *The Muslim World* 90 (2000): 260 (emphasis mine). See also Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 127-28, passim.

[30] Safi, "Bargaining with *Baraka*," 266.

[31] For my discussion of "experiential-expressivist" models of mysticism and Schleiermacher see chapter 2, pp. 115-16, passim.

[32] As Carl Ernst shows, both constructions of Sufism have been present since the beginning of its modern study in the mid eighteenth century. Thus, "[o]utsider terminology for Sufism stressed the exotic, the peculiar, and behavior that diverges from European norms," while other early depictions saw Sufis as "freethinkers" who had more to do with Christianity and Greek philosophy than with Islam. Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997), 3, 9.

[33] Safi, "Bargaining with *Baraka*," 260.

premodern examples, often simultaneously.[34]

Yet, Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi have not always enjoyed equal praise in the West as "enlightened" representatives of Sufism. The Persian training of the early British Orientalists who "discovered" Sufism in India in the eighteenth century, along with the philological interests of many of the nineteenth century Orientalists who followed them, naturally led to a scholarly preoccupation with Persian Sufi poetry and an association of Sufism with Persia itself. These scholars typically viewed Sufis as "freethinkers" or even "libertarians" whose creative spirituality could not be farther from the desolate aridity of Arabian Islam.[35] Through the nineteenth century slide from language to race (as discussed in chapter 3) such associations, as Carl Ernst notes, "would turn into a theory of Sufism as 'Aryan' mysticism overlaid on the 'Semitic' legalism of the Arabs."[36] Thus, in his now classic 1893 memoir *A Year Among the Persians*, E. G. Browne asserts that "Súfís," as part of "a host of heterodox sects born on Persian soil,"

> arose *to vindicate the claim of Aryan thought to be free*, and to transform the religion forced on the nation by Arab steel into something which, though still wearing a semblance of Islám had a significance *widely different from that which one may fairly suppose was intended by the Arabian prophet*.[37]

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[34] E.g., in a recent book on Islam, interfaith dialogue, and religious pluralism, Akbar S. Ahmed discusses the possibilities of common understanding between "Islam and the West" through a "dialogue of civilizations," which he suggests is a process, not of emotions, but of "rational thought." As such, he invokes Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi: "Perhaps the greatest model for dialogue still relevant is provided by the two great mystics Jalal al-Din Rumi and Ibn 'Arabi, whose works convey the essential unity of the divine vision in synagogue, church, and mosque." Akbar S. Ahmed, "Islam and the West: Clash or Dialogue of Civilisations?," in *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, ed. Roger Boase (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 105, 112.

[35] See Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide*, 8-9, 15; and Alexander Knysh, "Historiography of Sufi Studies in the West," in *A Companion to the History of the Middle East*, ed. Youssef M. Choueiri (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 109. See also Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 106.

[36] Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide*, 15.

[37] Edward G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians: Impressions as to the Life, Character, and Thought of the People of Persia, Received During Twelve Months' Residence in that Country in the Years 1887-1888*, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1893), 123 (emphasis mine).

In such discourse, Indo-Persian (i.e., "Aryan") Sufism is constructed as reflective of the Western imaginary in its "*free-thinking*" and "*free-living*" style, while so-called Arab Sufism is commonly said to display more narrow and rigid "Semitic" characteristics—as the formidable British scholar of Sufism Reynold Nicholson (d. 1945) himself asserts on the very first page of the preface to his acclaimed *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*.[38]

As I will explore in more detail below, the Aryan/Semitic binary has continued to inform the Western reception of Ibn 'Arabi until today, but in changing and more muted ways. As late as 1957, W. C. Smith would contextualize the poetic tradition of Indo-Persian Sufism as a type of mystical humanism that resembles the artistic sensibilities of ancient Greece, while simultaneously denigrating the Arab Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi as a somehow stilted and thus less "authentic" religious expression.[39] Yet, the following year saw the publication of Henry Corbin's *L'Imagination créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabî* (Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ʿArabī), which effectively Persianized Ibn 'Arabi. In the mid 1960s, Seyyed Hossein Nasr would synthesize Corbin's Persianization of Ibn 'Arabi with Schuonian Perennialism, thus raising Ibn 'Arabi out of his Arab-Semitic encrustation and transposing him onto the open discursive field of Rumi's reasonableness.[40] As will be shown below, Ibn 'Arabi's recent transformation from a rather convoluted Semitic metaphysician to a premodern Muslim forerunner of "European" secular-liberal autonomy

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[38] Reynold A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (1921; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), v (emphasis mine).

[39] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 34n31. See pp. 283-85 below.

[40] ʿAbdolkarim Soroush's repeated use of Rumi in the context of Kantian rationalism is an excellent example of a similar discourse. See ʿAbdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, trans. and ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 79, 88, 94, 98.

underscores both the protean *and* racialist nature of Western views regarding "mysticism" and rationality.

Yet, modern narratives about the Western construction of "mysticism"—whether *negative* in terms of its Enlightenment framing of "false" religion (i.e., enthusiasm, fanaticism, pietism, eroticism, etc.) or *positive* in its romantic revaluation as "the fountainhead of all genuine spirituality"[41]— seemingly agree upon one point: the "mystical" is overwhelmingly opposed to "the pursuit of rationality."[42] Indeed, King notes that while the opposition between the mystical and the rational are indeed ancient, "the explicit polarization of rationality and mysticism takes on a particularly potent influence in the modern era […]."[43] With the onslaught of Western secularization and rationalization, "the mystical" becomes, as in Kant, "the death of philosophy."[44]

While it is true that "mystical fanaticism" for Kant was simply a form of magical thinking that obscured pure rational religion,[45] Kant's entire epistemology draws heavily upon the intellectual mysticism of the Christian Platonic tradition.[46] Indeed, the partial "genealogy" that I sketch below shows that a Western discourse asserting a rational Islamic mysticism, which similarly draws upon categories of Christian Platonism, has been present

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[41] Leigh Eric Schmidt, "The Making of Modern 'Mysticism'," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 2 (2003): 278-81.

[42] King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 27.

[43] Ibid., 32.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009), 144, passim.

[46] Hunter, "Kant's Regional Cosmopolitanism," 173. See p. 259 below.

since the initial European "discovery" of Sufism.[47] Why then does such a discourse manifest

in the Euro-American construction of Sufism, while it remains undeveloped in other Western

treatments of mysticism?

As noted in the introduction to this study, Jantzen has importantly pointed out that

"what counts as mysticism *will reflect* (and also *help to constitute*) the institutions of power

in which it occurs."[48] Additionally, King has observed that the denial of rationality "has been

a common strategy in subordinating the Other throughout human history […]."[49] In light of

these two important insights, I theorize that the category of "reason" has been mobilized in

the discourse of reasonable Sufism as a means to subordinate Islam(*ism*), which in such

discourse is variously referred to as "fundamentalist," "orthodox," "normative," "Sunni," or

"standard" Islam. It is indeed such a juxtaposition between rational and irrational conceptions

of religion—what Jenkins above calls a "clash of civilizations […] within Islam itself"—that

I argue fuels the ongoing construction of Sufism as "reasonable" mysticism.

The idea of an *intra*-religious "clash of civilizations" within Islam, implicit in

Schwartz and explicit in Jenkins, spins off the famous claim made in Bernard Lewis's oft-

mentioned 1990 article "The Roots of Muslim Rage." Here, Lewis uses the "irrational" and

violent "*religious culture of Islam*" as a civilizational foil to "*our Judeo-Christian

heritage*"—an "ancient" rivalry that formed "no less than a clash of civilizations […]."[50]

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[47] I follow an Asadian notion of "genealogy" here that does not pretend to be "a substitute for social history," but rather "a way of working back from our present to the contingencies that have come together to give us our certainties." Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 16.

[48] Jantzen, *Power*, 14 (emphasis mine).

[49] King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 25.

[50] Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly* 266, no. 3 (1990): 60 (emphasis mine). Samuel Huntington would later capitalize on Lewis's phraseology and developed the now famous "clash of civilizations" hypothesis first in a 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article and later in an expanded monograph. See Samuel

While a recent example of Lewis's own addition to the discourse of reasonable Sufism will be explored below, here it is important to note that both Schwartz and Jenkins above invert Lewis's conceit into an entirely Muslim conflict. No longer is Islam representative of a single culture, but is bifurcated in terms of Lewis's above pattern: Sufism as reflective of "*our Judeo-Christian heritage*," while Islam(*ism*) simply plays the tautological role of its own "irrational" religion.

I thus argue that while the discourse of reasonable Sufism is clearly a discourse of othering, it is also—*and more explicitly*—a discourse of "saming." In other words, the discourse of reasonable Sufism promulgates a form of ideological racism through the *universalization of sameness*. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari note, such racism "never detects the particles of the other; it propagates waves of sameness until those who resist identification have been wiped out (or those who only allow themselves to be identified at a given degree of divergence)."[51] Indeed, the debate about Jewish emancipation in nineteenth century Germany was fueled by a similar project of Kantian universalism and imposition of sameness. As Michael Mack notes, because Jews were perceived as lacking the Kantian ideal of autonomous religious subjectivity, they were "excluded from an idealist body politic."[52] Thus, in order to become a member of the modern German state, Jews needed to "lose their otherness."[53] Similarly, this chapter looks at how such Kantian framing of religion inherent within the Western liberal-secular imaginary has constructed Sufism *as a means for Muslims*

P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22–49; and *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

[51] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 178.

[52] Michael Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 19.

[53] Ibid., 19.

to lose their otherness. Here, Sufism is colonized and acculturated to the Western imaginary as an "authentic" evolution of rational religion, while "normative" Islam is racially marked as irrationally and Semitically heteronomous and thus in need of reform on the model of Sufism itself.

Discovering Ourselves: The European "Species" of Sufi

Carl Ernst has trenchantly noted that concomitant to the British Orientalist "discovery" of the "Sooffees" in the latter half of the eighteenth century in India, the term *Sufi-ism* was invented "as an appropriation of those portions of 'Oriental' culture that Europeans found attractive."[54] In terms of religion, one of the things that eighteenth century Europeans seemed to have found most attractive was their own self-image. As David Pacini recently observes, seventeenth and eighteenth century European thought marked a "shift from a conception of religion as conformity to the divine order of being to a conception of religion as conformity to the human ordering of ideas […]."[55] This "modern religion of conscience," or "*looking glass*" religion, according to Pacini was based upon "a view of the modern subject whose most enduring trait was its dissociation from the world around it, and what was more, its subsequent transformation of that world into an image of itself."[56]

Although the beginnings of the modern sea change in religious subjectivity and the emergence of the religion of conscience cannot be found in any one Enlightenment thinker, its early synthesis finds full enunciation arguably in Kant.[57] As Susan Meld Shell observes,

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[54] Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, 9.

[55] Pacini, *Through Narcissus' Glass*, 6-7.

[56] Ibid., 13.

[57] Besides Kant, Pacini focuses on the thought of Hobbes and Rousseau. Yet, Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, and Alexander Pope would have to be added to any even partial genealogy of this shift.

while Kant follows Rousseau's subordination of "religious faith to sincerity before the voice of human conscience […], Kant goes further than Rousseau *in insisting on the sufficiency of conscience*, or the moral law, to motivate the human heart."[58] As Kant himself notes, "The question […] is not how conscience should be guided (*for it needs no guide*; having a conscience is enough), *but how conscience itself can serve as guiding thread in the most perplexing moral decisions*."[59] Conscience, for Kant, thus "becomes the court *in which reason lays down for itself its own inner law*."[60] Such a totalizing subjective "court" of reason makes up what Pacini calls the "Kantian 'critical standpoint,'" which replaces the traditional "idea that the world constitutes me with the idea that I constitute the world […]."[61] This idea, i.e., that knowledge is determined by the subject rather than the object, forms the essence of Kant's "Copernican" turn.[62]

In his 1793 work *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, Kant theorizes such Copernican subjectivity as the final phase of the development of religion in human history. Although presented as a philosophy of religion, *Religion* is equally a "history of reason" that prefigures Hegel's own dialectical teleology of history.[63] Here, history is conceived as the

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[58] Susan Meld Shell, *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 188-89 (emphasis mine).

[59] Kant, *Religion*, 206 (emphasis mine).

[60] Shell, *Kant*, 189 (emphasis mine).

[61] Pacini, *Through Narcissus' Glass*, 10.

[62] In the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant compares his subjective turn to Copernicus: "[L]et us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition […]. This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus […]." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 110. See also Stephen Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 45.

[63] Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 4, 7.

teleological realization of autonomous reason, which for Kant begins with a Greek inspired

form of "statutory" Judaism, evolves into a Christianity whose progressively mature forms

increasingly shed the "cloak" of childish law, and finally emerges as purely autonomous

rational religion.[64]

Evidence that such an autonomous subjectivity and historical teleology of

autonomous rational religion were part of the interpretive framework at the very beginnings

of the Western study of Sufism can be found in the first European article solely dedicated to

Sufism. Written by Lt. James William Graham of the British East India Company in 1811

(and published in 1819), "A Treatise on Sufiism" is representative of a nascent liberal

Protestant tradition informed by the anthropocentric *zeitgeist* of the age.[65] On the surface,

Graham's treatise interprets Sufi doctrine through elaborate analogies made from classical

Christian Platonic conceptions of divine emanation, Trinitarian speculation, and the process

of self-knowledge through the soul's reflection of—and ultimate union with—the divine.[66]

The importance of Graham's treatise as representative of the early Orientalist treatment of

Sufism through such analogical models (along with mention of Indian traditions) was

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[64] Kant, *Religion*, 139-151.

[65] James William Graham, "A Treatise on Sufiism, or Mahomedan Mysticism: Read 30th December 1811," in *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay with Engravings*, vol. 1 (1819; reprint, Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1877), 95-128. As Roger Olson observes, the anthropocentric "*Zeitgeist*" of the Enlightenment formed the cultural and intellectual context of liberal Protestant theology. Here, Olson puts Kant—as "both the apex and greatest critic of the Enlightenment"—at the foundations of liberal Protestant thought, which emerged with Schleiermacher at the turn of the nineteenth century. See Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 540.

[66] Although it is often referred to as Christian Neoplatonism, this tradition as most influentially known through the writings of St. Augustine (d. 430) also sought theological inspiration in the older Platonism. See Janet Coleman, "The Christian Platonism of St Augustine," in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, ed. Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 27-37.

brought to scholarly attention by Arthur Arberry and more recently by Ernst.[67] Here, I wish to revisit Graham's treatise once more to show how the modern religion of conscience underlies its overt Christian Platonic interpretive framework.

As I will discuss more below, the Christian Platonic tradition from which Graham draws upon also played a formative role in Kant's own intellectual tradition. One of the controlling metaphysical ideas of this tradition that was transmogrified in the Kantian turn to the subject is the process of self-reflection. Going as far back as the tradition of the Delphic Oracle in the Platonic school, the metaphorical image of the mirror was deployed to represent the rational part of the soul that reflects its true nature in the divine.[68] The Platonic concept of *reflection* and *self-knowledge* is thus directly linked to the Delphic command "Know thyself!," which as Douglas Hedley notes, means "Know God!"[69] Augustine's treaty *The Trinit*y famously employed the Platonic tradition of the Delphic Oracle as the intellectual process of self-knowledge culminating in the unity of the knowing subject with divine reason; here, "the knower is transformed by the object of contemplation."[70] The Delphic command along with the apostle Paul's statement "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12) became central elements of Christian Platonic speculation.[71]

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[67] See Arthur J. Arberry, An Introduction to The History of Ṣūfism: The Sir Abdullah Suhrawardy Lectures for 1942 (Londong: Longmans, Green and Company, 1943), 11-13; and Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide*, 13-15.

[68] Douglas Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion: Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 112.

[69] Ibid., 113.

[70] Ibid., 114.

[71] Ibid.

Similarly, in "A Treatise on Sufiism" Graham notes that Sufis hold the same doctrine as the early church fathers who believed "the Scripture itself authorizes a belief of the ultimate union of the soul with the Deity,"[72] Graham thus asserts that the Sufi conception of God's emanation within the nature of humanity is a replication of the Trinity; "though I am sorry to say," he informs his readers, "they do not take it as such."[73] In addition to such Christian references, Graham predictably makes recourse to the Delphic command. In an attempt to establish a general analogy between "the nature of Sufiism" and what Graham calls "the spiritual man of our doctrine" he asserts:

> The grand thing herein is to 'know one's self,' according to the motto I have adopted, in its full spiritual and proper sense. "*The proper study of Mankind is Man*:" let him circle the globe, let him traverse the skies; and then, for something more worthy his notice and admiration, return to himself.[74]

Here, Graham's discourse reveals a subtle break from traditional Christian Platonism by supporting his invocation of the Delphic Oracle with an intertextual reference to Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* (1734). Pope himself begins the second book of the *Essay* by invoking the Delphic command: "Know then thyself, *presume not God to scan*."[75] Graham simply picks up where Pope's first line leaves off, thus quoting its second: "*The proper study of Mankind is Man*." Pope's first couplet thus foreshadows Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and its assertion that knowledge of things outside of sensory experience (i.e., the phenomenal), such as God, is impossible. Indeed, Pope was a favorite poet of Kant's, and it has been

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[72] Graham, "A Treatise on Sufiism," 99.

[73] Ibid., 117-18.

[74] Ibid., 126 (emphasis mine).

[75] Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man: Epistles I.-IV*. (London: Macmillan and Company, 1899), 14 (emphasis mine).

suggested that Pope's ideas were formative for Kant's philosophy.[76] While, Kant defined

philosophy as the study of humankind and its purpose in "the whole vocation of man,"[77] in

the *Essay* Pope declares reason "The God within the mind."[78]

It is through Graham's textual reference to Pope, whom he does not cite by name, and

his direct reference to Rousseau,[79] that a pronounced difference emerges between Graham's

approach to self-knowledge and that of premodern Christian Platonism. In the Christian

Platonic tradition, as mentioned above, the *subject* is defined by the divine *object* reflected

within the mirror of the soul. Yet, by the time Pope's *Essay* was published "it was

commonplace that all human knowledge was subjective, dependent on sense experience and,

consequently limited."[80] No longer revealing knowledge of an internal divine nature, this

new Enlightenment framework of "self-reflection" is centered around the ordering of human

reason.[81] And yet, because human reason can only know itself, and not "presume" knowledge

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[76] See Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 357 n24. See also Ernest Campbell Mossner, "Pope, Alexander (1688–1744)," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Donald M. Borchert, 2nd ed., vol. 7 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006), 687.

[77] Immanuel Kant cited in Roger J. Sullivan, *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 11. According to Harry Solomon, Pope's second line also anticipates Hume's statement in *A Treatise of Human Nature*: "Human Nature is the only science of man." Harry M. Solomon, *The Rape of the Text: Reading and Misreading Pope's "Essay on Man"* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 67.

[78] Pope, *Essay on Man*, 19.

[79] Noting how the Sufi is constantly immersed in contemplation, Graham states that he styles God "his idol and beloved, and addresses him in the language of a lover to his mistress." Graham then immediately notes: "'When the passion of love is at its height,' says Rousseau, 'it arrays the beloved object in every possible perfection; makes it an idol [and] places it in heaven […].'" Graham, "A Treatise on Sufiism," 127.

[80] Solomon, *The Rape of the Text*, 67.

[81] Pacini, *Through Narcissus' Glass*, 4-5.

of God, its finitude establishes both the parameters of knowledge and acknowledges a divine-like power "to produce itself."[82]

Thus, Graham immediately follows his above call for man to "return to himself" by stating that "[t]o himself he is a theatre immense, *and was reputed such when that theatre had much less to exhibit than at present it can boast, and when it was but faintly illuminated with the glimmering beams of far more feeble light.*"[83] Here, Graham refers to a distinct historical teleology: even in antiquity man was held to be an immense spiritual theatre, but compared to man's present illumination, his light was then "far more feeble." Graham thus makes a dual analogy, comparing Sufism and Christianity as mirror images of the realization of the Delphic command in the Pauline assertion that the human "theatre" is "consecrated into a venerable temple, a temple of the Holy Spirit."[84] Indeed, such a teleology equating Sufism and Christianity with what he identifies as "the supreme wisdom of man" has, according to Graham, a common origin. Here Graham compares the doctrine of Sufism to the Pauline "doctrine of grace doing away with the law and its works; for the Mussulman Shĕryât in its feature very much resembles the Jewish dispensation […]."[85] Indeed, Graham tellingly sets Sufism, which he calls a "doctrine of spiritualism and grace," against the "scribes and pharisees of the Mahomedan synagogue."[86]

In recounting the path of Sufism, Graham relates that a Sufi may be "*a person of any*

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[82] Yirmiahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The adventures of immanence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 7.

[83] Graham, "A Treatise on Sufiism," 126 (emphasis mine).

[84] I.e., "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit […]" (1 Cor. 6:19). Graham, "A Treatise on Sufiism," 126 (emphasis mine).

[85] Graham, "A Treatise on Sufiism," 126.

[86] Ibid., 119.

religion or sect."[87] Such a "mystery," according to Graham, lies in the fact of the Sufi's

"total disengagement" from the sensory world, which includes not only "*an entire throwing*

off not only of every superstition […,] *but of the practical mode of worship, ceremonies, &c.*

laid down in every religion […]."[88] Yet, this process of "throwing off" superstition and "the

practical mode of worship," what Graham also refers to as the "*pharisaical mode of*

worship,"[89] only happens when the mind of the Sufi is "properly nurtured *and become*

matured" through "tuition and due reflection."[90] This marks the first stage of the Sufi path

when the mind "may throw off those things which it was at first taught to revere, and enter

into the view of a sublimer system."[91] It is from the view of this "sublimer system," that

"*man arrives to a knowledge of his own nature*" and thus "*may himself then look upon those*

outward prescribed forms as nugatory."[92]

In the midst of the above explanation, which takes up several pages, Graham again

references a line of Pope's *Essay*, stating that the Sufi "may be said, in the words of a great

poet of ours, '*To look through nature up to nature's God*."[93] Again, Graham only quotes the

second line of a couplet, while the first is inferred: "*Slave to no sect, who takes no private*

road."[94] Indeed, directly after his above description of Sufism as a "sublimer system" where

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[87] Ibid., 96 (underline mine).

[88] Graham, "A Treatise on Sufiism," 96-97 (emphasis mine).

[89] Ibid., 97.

[90] Ibid., 101-102.

[91] Ibid., 102.

[92] Ibid., (emphasis mine).

[93] Ibid., 98 (emphasis mine).

[94] Pope, *Essay on Man*, 44 (emphasis mine).

"man arrives to a knowledge of his own nature" and thus perceives the "*prescribed forms as nugatory*," Graham states:

> It may not be unworthy of remark, especially in this place, that we are, generally speaking, at least in this country, looked upon as a species or one kind of *Sûfî, from our non-observance here of any rites or forms*, conceiving a worship of the Deity in mind, *and adherence to morality, sufficient*. In fine, *the present free-thinker or modern philosopher of Europe* would be esteemed a sort of Sûfi […].[95]

Graham ends this interruption by referring to what he identifies as a hadith: "The Sûfi has no religion."[96] Graham repeats this so-called hadith elsewhere in fuller form: "'The Sûfi has no religion, on account of his nonobservance of the rites, forms, or ceremonies of any religion:' so says the Mahomedan lawgiver […]."[97]

That Graham sees himself as "a species" of Sufi, whom he associates above with no formal "religion" and whom he simultaneously identifies with the European "free-thinker," or "modern philosopher," is telling. Such assertions when taken together with Graham's above description of the European "Sufi" as "conceiving a worship of the Deity in mind, *and adherence to morality, sufficient*" show that Graham's interpretation of Christian Platonism goes beyond the orthodox tradition of Protestant scholasticism and is informed by the modern religion of conscience and its attendant idea of *self-governing morality*. Indeed, such assertions in combination with Graham's additional claims above—i.e., that Sufism is open to people of "*any religion or sect*," that it is the specific result of a teleological process of intellectual *nurturance and maturation*, and that the practical result of such intellectual maturity is the "throwing off" of both *superstition* and the "*pharisaical mode of worship*"— are all tropes that echo a European universal religion of reason like that which is

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[95] Graham, "A Treatise on Sufiism," 102.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., 109.

systematically presented in Kant's 1793 work *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*. Although there is no evidence that Graham specifically refers to Kant, the elements of Pope's *Essay* mobilized by Graham reveal a particular modern subjectivity seminally established and enunciated in Kant's Copernican turn. Thus, buried within Graham's early account of Sufism are the rudimentary discursive practices that will form the discourse of reasonable Sufism and will increasingly reflect the European self-image as synthesized in the Kantian universal religion of reason. It is to the formative edifice of Kant's universal religious subjectivity—which is strikingly prefigured by Pope's above mentioned line "*Slave to no sect, who takes no private road*"—that we now turn.

Casting off Cloaks of Servitude: The Kantian Teleology of "Bare Rational Religion"

As Ian Hunter recently notes, Kant's north-German Protestant university metaphysics was deeply infused with Christian Platonic anthropology. Such anthropology, like that of Augustine's mentioned above, posited that while the human soul is created, it retains a trace of the divine image through its rationality and freedom. By freeing itself from the slavery of the senses, Augustine thought that the rational mind could attain to spiritual wisdom within *the intelligible divine order* through the indwelling Christ and divine law.[98] It was the intelligible divine order, and not the created world, that was understood to be the source of all knowledge. While Kant maintained this strict epistemological divide, he situated human reason, instead of a purported indwelling divinity, as pure rational being (*Vernunftwesen*) and thus pure intelligence (*homo noumenon*).[99] Thus, in *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* Kant establishes human autonomous reason as self-regulating moral law in place of

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[98] Coleman, "The Christian Platonism," 30-31.

[99] Hunter, "Kant's Regional Cosmopolitanism," 173.

divine intelligence by invoking the Christian Platonic idea of the *Logos* as the divine archetype.[100] As such Kant claims that to "to *elevate* ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection, i.e., to the archetype of the moral attitude in all its purity, is a universal human duty […]."[101]

Indeed, the Kantian idea of the pure rational being not only exists independently of space and time, but also has a dual intellectual function: (i) to intelligize pure forms of experience, and (ii) to govern the will by thinking the form of its law.[102] It is through these intellectual processes that "Kant's *homo noumenon* or rational being is supposed to free himself from the 'sensuous inclinations' that otherwise tie the will of empirical man (*homo phenomenon*) to extrinsic ends or goods."[103] Kant's teleological approach to history can thus be understood as an attempt to show a progressive development from *homo phenomenon* to *homo noumenon*, and Kant's critique of religion theorizes this progression. In *Religion*, Kant states:

> It is [...] a necessary consequence of the physical and simultaneously of the moral predisposition in us—the latter being the foundation and simultaneously the interpreter of all religion—*for religion finally to be detached gradually from all empirical determining bases, from all statutes that rest on history* and that, by means of a church faith, unite human beings provisionally in order to further the good, and *thus for pure rational religion ultimately to rule over all*, "so that God may be all in all."[104]

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[100] Kant states: "That which alone can make a world the object of divine decree and the purpose of creation is *humanity* (the rational world being as such) *in its complete moral perfection* […]. This human being, alone pleasing to God, 'is in God from eternity'; the idea of him emanates from God's essence; he is to that extent not a created thing but God's only begotten Son, 'the *word* (the *Let it be so!*) through which all other things are, and without which nothing exists that has been made' (since for its sake, i.e., for that of the rational being in the world, as this being can be thought according to its moral vocation, everything has been made)." Kant, *Religion*, 66-67.

[101] Kant, *Religion*, 67.

[102] Hunter, "Kant's Regional Cosmopolitanism," 173.

[103] Ibid., 173-74.

[104] Kant, *Religion*, 135 (emphasis mine).

Here, Kant posits a divinely given "moral predisposition" of the human being that has served as the foundation of all positive religions.[105] The purity and sole truth of this autonomous morality has facilitated the progressive detachment of the positive religions from their historical accretions—i.e., their scriptural laws. This *narrative of emancipation* finds its telos in the final emergence of a "pure rational religion"—what Kant also calls "the universal true religious faith"[106]—that will ultimately "rule over all."[107] Like Graham's assertion above that a Sufi may be "*a person of any religion or sect*," Kant notes that the universal true religious faith "offers itself on its own to *any human reason* and is, therefore, *found in the religion of most civilized peoples*."[108]

While such pure rational religion may be inherent in the religion of "civilized peoples," it is not always evident. Indeed, the framing metaphor in *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* equates the human moral predisposition with autonomous "bare rational faith."[109] Thus, in perhaps the most iconic passage of *Religion*, Kant states:

> *The cloaks* under which *the embryo first formed* itself into the human being *must be cast off* if he is now to step into the light of day. The leading string of holy tradition, with its appendages—the statutes and observances—which in its time rendered good services, is little by little becoming dispensable, indeed in the end a fetter, *when he enters adolescence*. As long as he (*the human genus*) "was a child, he was astute as a child" *and knew how to combine with statutes—which had been imposed on him without his collaboration*—[…] "*But now that he becomes a man, he puts away what is childish*."[110]

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[105] Kant also calls this moral predisposition the "pure *moral* legislation whereby the will of God is originally inscribed in our hearts." Kant, *Religion*, 114.

[106] Kant, *Religion*, 154.

[107] It is telling that Kant should end this passage by referring to Paul (1 Cor. 15:28): "so that God may be all in all" as this is also one of the various Pauline statements that Graham uses to describe Sufism. Graham, "A Treatise on Sufiism," 99.

[108] Kant, *Religion*, 155.

[109] Ibid., 113.

[110] Ibid., 135 (emphasis mine). Kant's reference is to 1 Cor. 13:11.

Kant thus sounds a clarion call for humanity to divest itself of its religious "cloaks," i.e., "the holy tradition" of theological constructions of the divine and their attendant "statutes and observances." While such veils were necessary in the beginning stages of human history to aid in the germination of pure faith, they need to be discarded now that humanity has matured. The human being must "cast off" such traditions through the quintessential path of autonomous reason, which will liberate "him" in the naked light of truth.[111] Thus, Graham's above assertion that the novitiate of the Sufi path will "*throw off those things which it was at first taught to revere, and enter into the view of a sublimer system*" strikingly echoes Kant. Graham's further assertion that the Sufi engages in "*an entire throwing off not only of every superstition* […,] *but of the practical mode of worship, ceremonies, &c. laid down in every religion* […]" again finds resonance in Kant who defined "religious superstition" as "[t]he *delusion that through religious acts of cult* we accomplish anything in regard to justification before God […]."[112]

According to Kant it is through an adherence to "bare rational faith" that the entire world can unite as an "ethical community"—what Kant also calls a "universal church"—and thus be "cleansed of the imbecility of superstition […]."[113] Importantly, Kant notes that the way to make the "transition to this new order" is "not to be expected from an external revolution," but rather "through a *gradually progressing reform* […]."[114] Accordingly, one of the subsections of *Religion* is titled: "Historical Presentation of the Gradual Founding of the

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[111] The obvious parallels to Schuon's doctrine of "sacred nudity" and its similar invocation of the "naked" truth is striking. See chapter 3, p. 214.

[112] Kant, *Religion*, 193.

[113] Ibid., 111-112, 113.

[114] Ibid., 136 (emphasis mine).

262

Dominion of the Good Principle on Earth."[115] As Yirmiahu Yovel notes, this historicization

maps "not only a succession in time, but equally *the ascent of the rational principle toward*

full self-consciousness."[116]

Given Kant's open opposition to any religious tradition of "statutory law," as most

clearly exemplified in Judaism, it should not surprise that Jesus serves in Kant's

metanarrative of the ascent of reason as the founder of "the first true church."[117] According to

Kant, Jesus brought only "*pure teachings of reason*." Rather than demanding "the observance

of external civic or statutory church duties," Jesus taught that "only the pure moral attitude of

the heart shall be able to make a human being pleasing to God."[118] Thus, Kant asserts

Christianity arose as "*a pure moral religion* in place of an ancient cult […]."[119] Since

Christianity was bound "*to no statutes at all*," it contained "*a religion valid for the world*, not

for one single people."[120] As such, Kant claims that "one cannot deny to this church the name

of *true universal church*."[121]

Perhaps less expectedly, however, is Kant's refusal to admit Judaism *any* historical

role in the emergence of pure rational religion. Indeed, according to Kant, "the *Jewish* faith

stands in <u>no essential connection whatsoever</u>, i.e., in no unity according to concepts, with this

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[115] Ibid., 138.

[116] Yovel, *Kant*, 207 (emphasis mine).

[117] Kant, *Religion*, 173.

[118] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[119] Ibid., 141 (emphasis mine).

[120] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[121] Ibid., 172 (emphasis mine).

[…] history we want to examine […]."[122] This is so, Kant contends, because "Judaism, as such, taken in its purity, *contains no religious faith at all*"; rather, it was founded only as "a political, *not an ethical community* […]."[123] Kant thus flatly asserts:

> The *Jewish faith* is, in terms of its original arrangement, a sum of merely statutory laws, on which a state constitution was based; for <u>whatever moral additions were *appended* to it, either already at that time or later on, absolutely do not belong to Judaism, as such</u>.[124]

Indeed, according to Kant, the invocation of the name of God in the Jewish tradition does not make Judaism a religion, since in this theocratic context God is "venerated merely as *a secular regent who makes no claim at all concerning and upon conscience* […]."[125] Thus, as Kant further on notes, Judaism serves as the model of a "*merely statutory faith*" whose "*slavish service*" was "*devoid of moral aim*."[126]

Although Kant finally consents to the fact that "Christianity arose from Judaism," he does so only within the context of the later history of Judaism when "*this otherwise ignorant people* had already been reached by much foreign (Greek) wisdom."[127] Indeed, "the Greek philosophers' moral doctrines of freedom," Kant contends, "*shocked the slavish mind*" of the Jew.[128] Kant thus notes that such Greek teachings enlightened Judaism and provided it with the morality and reason necessary to facilitate the coming of Jesus.[129] Here, it is important to

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[122] Kant, *Religion*, 139 (underline mine).

[123] Ibid., 140 (emphasis mine).

[124] Ibid., 139 (underline mine).

[125] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[126] Ibid., 172 (emphasis mine).

[127] Ibid., 141 (emphasis mine).

[128] Ibid., 90 (emphasis mine).

[129] Ibid., 141-42.

note the parallels between Kant's explanative recourse to a "foreign (Greek) wisdom" that gave rise to Christianity from Judaism and the Orientalist trope of necessary Greek (or other "Aryan") mediation for the evolution of Sufism from Islam. As mentioned above, since Kant equates true morality with self-legislation through autonomous reason, his insistence that "the Jewish faith" lies outside the history of true religion because it lacks an ethical system is to argue that Judaism is *inherently irrational*.

It is through the persistent discrimination against Judaism in *Religion* that Kant's teleology clearly emerges as an ideological narrative rather than a reasoned argument. Indeed, in the preface to the second edition of *Religion* (1794), Kant notes that "[t]o understand this work in terms of its essential content, only common morality is needed, without venturing into the critique of practical reason, still less into that of theoretical reason [...]."[130] What Kant implicitly admits to here is that *Religion* cannot be understood as a formal argument; rather, it is presented as a "religious" treatise that seeks to morally "educate" through what Kant calls "*the transformation of the way of thinking*."[131] As such, *Religion* is an ideological and proselytizing work where, as Yovel notes, "reason does not prove itself *but asserts itself* [...]."[132] Indeed, Kant's ideological proselytization focuses upon all those who follow a statutory faith, which as noted above is for Kant epitomized in Judaism, and is nowhere more evident than in his final work *The Conflict of the Faculties*,

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[130] Kant, *Religion*, 13.

[131] Ibid., 55 (emphasis mine). As Yovel notes, "It is no accident [...] that in the *Religion* Kant is largely preoccupied with a philosophy of history [...]," since unlike his epistemology, his teleology of religion is not "*based upon a formal argument or a transcendental deduction*." Yovel, *Kant*, 212-13.

[132] Yovel, *Kant*, 212 (emphasis mine).

published in 1798.[133]

Here, Kant argues "on the subject of sectarianism" that "we are accustomed to say that it is desirable for many kinds of religion […] to exist in a state."[134] This is desirable, Kant informs us, only "*to the extent* that it is a good sign […] that the people are allowed freedom of belief." Yet, such "freedom," Kant qualifies, "*is not a good thing unless the principle underlying it is of such a nature as to bring with it universal agreement on the essential maxims of belief* […]."[135] In other words, the existence of different religions *is only good* if such religions all agree on an essential doctrine, which Kant goes on to note is "the moral improvement of men."[136] Because Christianity is at base "a pure moral religion," which Kant establishes in *Religion* above, time will gradually bring the differences between "[e]nlightened Catholics and Protestants […] closer to the dignity of their end, religion itself […]."[137] However, Kant asserts that "for this reason *the faith in question cannot be faith that we can obtain God's favor or pardon by anything other than a pure moral attitude of will*."[138] Since Judaism is such an Other faith, it follows that it is not in "*universal agreement on the essential maxims of belief*." Thus, Kant states that although "dreaming of a conversion of all Jews (to Christianity in the sense of a *messianic* faith)" is no longer sensible, still

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[133] *The Conflict of the Faculties* addresses the tension between the philosophy, theology, secular science, and the state within the Prussian university system. Kant argues that the lower faculty of Philosophy is by nature autonomous (through the use of transcendent reason) and solely concerned with the oversight of the higher faculties of Theology, Law, and Medicine, which in turn directly affect the lives of people and thus require philosophical critique and governmental censure.

[134] Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties: Der Streit der Fakultäten*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 91, 93.

[135] Ibid., 93.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Ibid.

266

we can consider it possible even in their case if, as is now happening, *purified religious concepts awaken among them and throw off the garb of the ancient cult,* which now serves no purpose and *even suppresses any true religious attitude.*[139]

While Kant here skillfully avoids calling for the *outward* conversion of the Jews, he nevertheless calls for an *inward* one. As Paul Rose notes,

> Kant has rejected the old Christian dream of converting the Jews, but in its place he envisages something far more insidiously destructive of Judaism, namely moral and human purification. The first step to this is to reform Judaism into a rational and moral religion of human freedom […].[140]

Indeed, in the same passage, Kant further asserts that he considers "the proposal of Ben David, a highly intelligent Jew, to adopt publicly the religion of *Jesus* (presumably with its vehicle, the *Gospel*)*,* a most fortunate one."[141] Such a move throughout the Jewish community, Kant further avers, would "quickly call attention to them as *an educated and civilized people who are ready for all the rights of citizenship* and whose faith could also be sanctioned by the government."[142] In other words, since Judaism is a faith that strives to please God through the obedience of statutory laws, it is in its traditional praxis *uncivilized* and thus *incompatible with modern society*.

As such, Jews are not eligible for the "freedom of belief" Kant otherwise proposes. It is only by accepting the validity of Christianity as a pure rational and moral faith, that Jews can hope to integrate into society and become, in essence, *rational*. As Shell notes, "*Judaism, thus transformed, becomes one Christian sect among others.*"[143] Thus Kant concludes:

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[139] Kant, *The Conflict*, 93 (emphasis mine).

[140] Paul Lawrence Rose, *Revolutionary Antisemitism in Germany from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton: New Jersey, 1990), 95.

[141] Kant, *The Conflict*, 95 (underline mine). Kant here refers to Lazarus Bendavid (d. 1832). See ibid., 217n17.

[142] Ibid., 95.

[143] Shell, *Kant*, 326 (emphasis mine).

The euthanasia of Judaism is pure moral religion, freed from all the ancient statutory teachings, some of which were bound to be retained in Christianity (as a messianic faith). *But this division of sects, too, must disappear in time, leading, at least in spirit, to what we call the conclusion of the great drama of religious change on earth (the restoration of all things), when there will be only one shepherd and one flock.*[144]

Kant's religious universalism thus emerges as a totalizing ideology that ominously presages "*the euthanasia of Judaism*" through global reform—i.e. "inward" *conversion*—supported by a teleology of autonomous religion. As evinced in Graham's treatise on Sufism above, the discourse of reasonable Sufism adopts such a Kantian framework. Like Kant's "*highly intelligent Jew*" who publically adopts Christianity and has thus "thrown off the garb of the ancient cult," the Sufi is presented as a *highly intelligent Muslim* who has adopted a "sublimer system" and accordingly thrown off "pharisaical" Islam.

Sufism at the End of History: Otto Pfleiderer and the Triumph of Kantian Religion

Shortly before his death in 1908, the internationally renowned Protestant theologian Otto Pfleiderer published a collection of lectures originally given at the University of Berlin in 1906.[145] Notable for its distinctly Kantian title, *Religion and Historic Faiths* is particularly exemplary in its faithfulness to a Kantian historiography of "pure rational religion" emerging from the evolution of "historical faiths."[146] Most significantly for the present study is

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[144] Kant, *The Conflict*, 95 (emphasis mine). "The restoration of all things" refers to Origen's doctrine of *Apokatastasis* and the universal "restoration" of all souls to their pure spiritual state. See Robert Turcan, "Apocatastasis," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 422.

[145] Otto Pfleiderer, *Religion and Historic Faiths*, trans. Daniel A. Huebsch (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1907). Eric Sharpe dubbed Pfleiderer the "father" of "the history of religion school" in Germany, which made important contributions to biblical studies. Its most influential member was Ernst Troeltsch (d. 1923). Pfleiderer held the chair of systematic theology at the University of Berlin and delivered the Hibbert Lectures in London in 1885 and the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh in 1894. In 1907, the year *Religion and Historic Faiths* was published and shortly before his death, he visited the US and gave a series of lectures at Harvard and the Brooklyn Institute. See Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (New York: Scribner's, 1975), 149-50. See also and "Review: Religion and Historic Faiths," *The Pacific Unitarian*16, no. 1 (1907): 27.

Pfleiderer's positioning of Sufism as the telos of his entire metanarrative.

In a chapter entitled "Religion and Ethics," Pfleiderer notes that "religion" is essentially different from its "positive church forms" such as "doctrines, ordinances and customs." Indeed, Pfleiderer asserts, "We ought to be permitted to take it for granted that anyone who talks about these matters knows *that these things are not religion, but merely its imperfect presentation-forms, coverings and shells* […]."[147] We should also presuppose, Pfleiderer adds, that just as we recognize the "law of evolution" in "all physical and historical life," we must also agree that "it holds good in religion as well as in morals."[148] As such, Pfleiderer rehearses a Kantian teleology of reason, where both religion and morality

> were given at the beginning not as completed entities, but were compelled to work their way out of crude beginnings gradually, *to rise from attachment to the senses to freedom of the spirit. Through arduous effort and education of generation after generation, reason must gradually be brought to consciousness in men and finally to mastery over them.*[149]

Indeed, Pfleiderer fittingly calls this teleology an "*educative process to reasonableness*" and continues to note that "the race, as well as the individual, *must pass through certain different stages* […]."[150] Pfleiderer continues to echo, in lockstep fashion, Kant's above iconic passage in *Religion* that proffers the metaphor of child development:

> *In the child-stage of development*, the good cannot be known by a reasoned judgment, and

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[146] Kant proffers a rather idiosyncratic (and starkly elitist) distinction between "religion" as hidden and "faith" as outwardly empirical. He states: "It is […] more fitting (as, indeed, it is actually more customary) to say, This human being is of this or that (Jewish, Mohammedan, Christian, Catholic, Lutheran) *faith,* than, He is of this or that religion. […] The common man understands by it always his church faith, which strikes his senses, whereas religion is hidden inwardly and depends on moral attitudes. One does too much honor to most people in saying of them that they confess this or that religion; for they are familiar with none and demand none; statutory church faith is all that they mean by this word." Kant, *Religion*, 118.

[147] Pfleiderer, *Religion*, 41 (emphasis mine).

[148] Ibid.

[149] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[150] Ibid.

cannot be desired nor done through a voluntary self-determination […]. *It is perfectly natural that this stage of development corresponds to the theocratic form of religion and morals*, that is, the idea that the good is a command to men from a strange and external will of God, the supermundane Lord. *In this form of religious consciousness, man does bear a relation to God which is as unfree as that of a slave to his master, or of a minor child to its tutor*. Just as this form of consciousness in the lower stage of development is inevitable, so little should it remain permanent. *When the time was ripe, the discipline of the law was removed and mankind called to freedom as the full-grown sons of God*. That was the new consciousness of God's children brought by Christianity.[151]

Following Kant further, Pfleiderer asserts that "[t]he real service of God is actually only moral activity in the world"—not through external worship (i.e., acts of "cult") where such moral activity is "a mere matter of chance and of secondary import […]."[152] According to Pfleiderer, the latter such worship is the cause of all religious "evil," and although it may have many "primitive" examples in history, it is characteristically represented by the "*rigidly theocratic and legalistic character of Judaism*."[153] Unlike Kant, however, Pfleiderer recognizes an original "ethical living spirit" in the prophets of Israel, which was nevertheless extinguished by "Pharisaical distortion."[154] Thus, Pfleiderer runs up against the same teleological problem that troubled Kant: how does Christianity, which is "*mankind called to freedom as the full-grown sons of God*," arise out of "Jewish legality and *unfreedom*"?[155]

Like Kant, Pfleiderer answers this conundrum of origins through recourse to the Greek tradition that, along with other "Oriental" elements, entered into "the thinking of the Jews […], *which prepared the foundation for a new religious structure of the future*."[156]

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[151] Pfleiderer, *Religion*, 41-42.

[152] Ibid., 31-32.

[153] Ibid., 274.

[154] Ibid., 244.

[155] Ibid., 42 (emphasis mine).

[156] Ibid., 245 (emphasis mine).

Thus, for example, Pfleiderer finds that the view of the author of Job "harmonizes completely" with Plato's "unconditional value of the ethically good."[157] "Wherever such an attitude shows itself," Pfleiderer strikingly claims, "we may well call it *Christianity before Christ*."[158] Indeed, according to Pfleiderer, Christian belief "gathered up in itself all the truths contained in the religions and philosophies of its time."[159] As such, "Christianity may be interpreted as *the higher unity* of the Jewish and the Greek ideas of God."[160] Yet, Christianity stands far above the "*heteronomy and subordination under strange ordinance and authority*" that marks Judaism.[161] Rather, it shares with the Stoics

> that *inner freedom* from the world, the calmness of *firm character*, the power of *self-determining will (autonomous)* and *the liberality of the humanitarian idea which reaches out over all nations and all classes* [. . .].[162]

As a result of such a synthesis, Pfleiderer triumphantly asserts that "Christianity became the religion of the religions, conquered the old world and led up to the new."[163]

Unable in good historical conscience to end his teleological account of religious history with the appearance of Christianity, as Kant does in *Religion*, Pfleiderer is faced with a potentially anti-climactic *because* anti-Christian end. Thus in his final chapter, Pfleiderer quickly renders Islam, as he does with non-Hellenic Judaism above, a theocracy and not a proper "religion." According to Pfleiderer, "*Islamism is the Jewish idea of theocracy* carried

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[157] Pfleiderer, *Religion*, 242.

[158] Ibid., 245 (emphasis mine).

[159] Ibid., 272.

[160] Ibid., 269 (emphasis mine).

[161] Ibid., 42 (emphasis mine).

[162] Ibid., 272-73 (emphasis mine).

[163] Ibid., 273.

out on a larger scale by the youthful national vigor of the Arabians, well calculated to discipline raw barbaric peoples, *but a brake on the progress of free human civilization*."[164] Although Muhammad posed as a prophet, he lacked "religious motives." After assuming "the rôle of political organizer" in Medina, Muhammad thus revealed his true intentions by creating a "national-Arabic theocracy by force of arms."[165] Here, the ritual prayer became "a form of military exercise," and the alms tax "formed the basis of the financiering of the new theocracy."[166]

According to Pfleiderer, not only is Islam's spiritual impoverishment marked by such militant ritualism, but also by its irrational theology: "God's despotic will was expressed, though *without logical completeness*, in the form of an absolute predestination."[167] Yet, Pfleiderer notes that with the appearance of the Muʿtazilites and their rationalist "objections to orthodox teaching" it seemed for a time "that *freer thought* was seeking expression in Islam." Yet, ultimately such rationalism was overcome by Islam's "immutable character" of absolute voluntarism.[168]

At the very end of *Religion and Historic Faiths*, Pfleiderer presents Sufism as a "peculiarity of Persian Islamism." After remarking that some of this "mystical-speculative tendency" is "deeply pious and *given to flights of high thinking*," Pfleiderer assures his readers "that this was not a genuine product of Arabian Islamism, even though it must remain undecided whether it owes its origin to ancient Persian, Indian or Neo-platonic

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[164] Pfleiderer, *Religion*, 274 (emphasis mine).

[165] Ibid., 279-81.

[166] Ibid., 279-80.

[167] Ibid., 283 (emphasis mine).

[168] Ibid., 286-87 (emphasis mine).

272

Gnosticism."[169] Like Graham above, Pfleiderer marks the first stage of Sufism as a departure from the "the plane of law" and the realization "*that external works are without value for those who know*, and in their stead there must be placed an ascetic freeing of the spirit from sensuality."[170] Thus, in the "highest plane" of Sufi realization

> God is no longer sought outside of one's self either by ritualistic or ascetic works, but upon which, the immanence in one's own spirit come [*sic*] into consciousness. *For the wise man and the mystic who has attained this knowledge, the varying doctrines and ordinances of the different religions have lost their meaning.*[171]

Tellingly, Pfleiderer concludes *Religion and Historic Faiths* with selections from Rumi's poetry, which he calls "*thought-laden*, pious poems."[172]

In *The Invention of World Religions*, Tomoko Masuzawa refers to "Pfleiderer's frank expression" in *Religion and Historic Faiths* as "useful in that it brings into plain view the major components of the stereotypical image of Islam that had by then gained predominance in Europe."[173] While Masuzawa's critique is insightful, she critically fails to acknowledge Pfleiderer's clear Kantian religious epistemology of pure reason and its particular historical teleology that I have fleshed out above. Yet, Masuzawa's final insight regarding Pfleiderer's treatment of Sufism—a construction she trenchantly labels "Aryan Islam"—touches precisely on my present argument. Here, she points out the similarity between Pfleiderer's above assertion that Sufi enlightenment entails the effacement of "*the varying doctrines and ordinances of the different religions*" and his earlier statement that Christianity "gathered up

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[169] Pfleiderer, *Religion*, 287.

[170] Ibid.

[171] Ibid., 288 (emphasis mine).

[172] Ibid. (emphasis mine). Here, Pfleiderer cites translations by Friedrich A. G. Tholuck and Friedrich Rueckert.

[173] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 200.

in itself all the truths contained in the religions and philosophies of its time." Masuzawa thus

notes:

> [I]n the heart of Sufism, or Aryan Islam, Pfleiderer seems to find himself in strangely familiar territory. Seen through the mystic kernel of Sufism, all the parochial and miserly laws, childish dogmas, and ceremonial encrustations that have constituted orthodox Islam seem to fall away. In effect, through deep contemplation, this kernel would come to seem something other than Islam proper, or Islam in the usual sense. [...] *This kernel, in effect, would become a sphere more or less coeval with Christianity or, if not quite that, with something yet nameless but very much like Christianity of the future*.[174]

Taking Masuzawa's lead here, I hasten to add that if Pfleiderer's above categorization of the

Jewish harmonization of Greek ethics as "*Christianity before Christ*" is taken as a premise

within his own Kantian historical teleology, then it follows that Sufism is thus *Christianity*

after Muhammad. In Kantian terms, Pfleiderer's history is therefore not simply about the

triumph of Christianity, but also *and even primarily* about the triumph of "universal true

religious faith" that first manifested, according to Kant, with the appearance of Christianity

as an "archetype to be emulated."[175] Indeed, as Kant states in *Religion*:

> One need only allow the germ of the true religious faith—as it has now been planted in Christendom [...]—*to develop further and further unhindered, in order to expect from it a continual approximation to the church that unites all human beings forever* and constitutes the visible presentation (the schema) of an invisible kingdom of God on earth.[176]

Yet, as mentioned above, Kant understood that such "unhindered" development would come

about only through a gradual reform, or *conversion*, of human consciousness. We thus turn to

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[174] Ibid., 203-204 (emphasis mine).

[175] Kant, *Religion*, 178. While Masuzawa does not pin down Pfleiderer's Kantian teleology here, she does insightfully identify the universal trajectories of "rational" Protestantism in her introduction. Here, she identifies two related versions: "One version of the account projects rational Protestant Christianity transcending its own historically particular origins, its own cultural limitations and finitude; consequently, triumphant modern Christianity will become something else altogether than 'mere' religion. Or, alternatively, a new, transcultural, objective world consciousness of science will override and vanquish the magical, religious, and metaphysical world-views hitherto dogmatically upheld by hidebound traditions; consequently, religion—and certainly any particular religion—will be obsolete and irrelevant. *In either scenario, the universal principle that guarantees the unity of the world, or the world as totality, ultimately comes to prevail as a direct extension of European Christianity, or Europe as (erstwhile) Christendom*." Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 12-13 (emphasis mine).

[176] Kant, *Religion*, 146 (emphasis mine).

the question of how the discourse of reasonable Sufism has been mobilized in the West as a discursive project of religious and civilizational reform.

Sufism and W. C. Smith's Kantian "Mission" of Autonomous Faith

When Wilfred Cantwell Smith was appointed the first W. M. Birks Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill University in 1949, his pluralistic approach to the academic study of religion seemed a world away from Pfleiderer's *Religion and Historic Faiths*. Indeed, two world wars had passed and the Cold War was under way. Even though Smith, like Pfleiderer, was an ordained Protestant minister, the rapid rise of global communication and the end of colonialism purported to have put paid to nineteenth century Christian triumphalism. In the academic study of religion, and the humanities more broadly, a perceived shift from evolutionary and hierarchical schemas of Christian superiority to geographic and decentered representation of "world-religions" promised a more egalitarian pluralism.[177] Both a formidable scholar and humanist theologian,[178] Smith was among a generation of post-war academics who held that the study of religion could help usher in a new global humanism that would transform the world from the devastation of war and totalitarianism.[179]

It has recently been asserted that during his academic career Smith intentionally set out to facilitate liberal Islamic reform in Muslim majority countries by redefining "authentic

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[177] Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 13.

[178] As Kenneth Cracknell notes, although Smith presented himself as a historian and comparativist, an unabashed theological impulse runs throughout his work. Kenneth Cracknell, introduction to *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader*, by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, ed. Kenneth Cracknell (New York: Oxford Oneworld, 2002), 20.

[179] Robert A. Orsi**,** *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 189.

Islamic mysticism as the socially engaged and ethically liberal practice of a rational ideal."[180]

While this claim suffers from a dearth of discursive evidence,[181] Smith's universalist

discourse does strikingly echo a Kantian teleology of rational religion with its attendant

antipathy towards law and historically fixed religious form. In this context, Smith's liberal

discursive practices around Islam, Sufism, and Semitic heteronomy anticipate less refined

twenty first century constructions of reasonable Sufism as a model of religious and

civilizational reform.

In the inaugural lecture to his 1949 appointment at McGill, entitled "The

Comparative Study of Religion," Smith asserts: "A science of religion would have failed of

its purpose, would have failed as a science, *if it did not prove itself useful to the religions in*

enabling them to function better."[182] Smith thus continues:

> Man has reached a stage in his intellectual development where such a service can, it would
> seem, be rendered, and rendered only, by *making that functioning self-conscious, and thereby*
> *self-critical and self-directing*. And in fact *only religions so liberated* can, so far as I can
> sense, serve men who have entered *into the heritage of modern knowledge*.[183]

Although wrapped in the new academic discourse of religious studies, Smith nevertheless

reproduces an emancipatory Kantian teleological metanarrative of the ascent of reason and

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[180] Rosemary R. Hicks, "Comparative Religion and the Cold War Transformation of Indo-Persian 'Mysticism' into Liberal Islamic Modernity," in *Secularism and Religion-Making*, ed. Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal Mandair (Oxford University Press, 2011), 143.

[181] While Hicks argues that Smith gathered around him a coterie of prominent Muslim and non-Muslim scholars who constructed a particularly liberal image of Sufism to import to the Muslim world, she seems to build this argument more upon assumption than discursive evidence. Although Hicks does importantly identify Smith's theoretical approach as being informed by the philosophy of personalism, Marxist thought, and the socialism of the Social Gospel movement, she is not concerned with the deeper discursive practices that make up such positions as I am below. See Hicks, "Comparative Religion," 143, 144-69 passim.

[182] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Comparative Study of Religion," in *McGill University Faculty of Divinity: Inaugural Lectures* (Montreal: McGill University, 1950), 48 (emphasis mine).

[183] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

the modern religion of conscience of "*self-conscious, and thereby self-critical and self-directing*" faith.

In the same address, Smith discusses the issue of religious authority and uses Islam as an example of divergent approaches: "Within Islam, for instance, the distinction between *external, formal authority and internal appreciation* corresponds by and large to the dichotomy in historical development *between Sunni and Sufi; the Law and mysticism*."[184] While Smith goes on to state that "at certain periods the Law, if unenlivened by Sufi warmth and spontaneity, has threatened to become cold, formalistic, *an incarceration* [...]," he also admits that it was through such "Law" that the tradition of Islam was socio-politically grounded and thus able to transmit to Sufis "that meaning of religion which they, *rightly, valued more highly than the outward expression*."[185] Here, the cold, external authority of the sharia has historically provided the sociopolitical ground necessary for the inner warmth of mystical truth.

Yet, in a later essay, Smith notes that the rise of such a heteronomous legal tradition in Islamic history corresponds to a "decline" in authentic "intellectual and religious life":

> *it would not be impossible to contend that historically the rise of a concept law as religiously absolute may be correlated with a decline, if not of Islamic civilization, anyway of the vigor of its intellectual and religious life.*[186]

Indeed, in Kantian terms, recourse to historical religion and statutory law marks a more primitive mode of religion compared to autonomous reason and morality. From such a Kantian perspective it should not surprise that Smith states that the concept of Islamic law,

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[184] Smith, "The Comparative Study," 57 (emphasis mine).

[185] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[186] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Concept of Shariʿa among some Mutakallimun," in *Arabic and Islamic studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb*, ed. George Makdisi (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 594 (emphasis mine).

i.e., sharia, "is appropriate primarily in those cases where one's sense of God and His immediate intervention, and one's sense of engagement, *of one's own immediate cosmic moral involvement*, are *weak or absent*."[187] Here, religious law is appropriate only when there cannot be an immediate engagement of "cosmic," i.e., transcendent, morality. When such an engagement is present, then law is in Kantian terms self-determined, and thus there is no need for recourse to a heteronomous system of ethics.

Importantly, in the same essay Smith notes "the fundamental divergence of ethical world-view between Greek and Semitic."[188] Smith continues to state that "the epistemology of the one is through *reasoning*, of the other through *revelation*."[189] This statement echoes a nineteenth century Greco-Aryan/Semitic binary, which as noted above was expressed early on in Kant's *Religion* and repeated in Pfleiderer, where the Greek conceptual apparatus is understood to be autonomous reason and morality, while conversely the Semite is heteronomously connected to external guidance—as Kant contends above: "the Greek philosophers' moral doctrines of freedom […] *shocked the slavish mind*" of the Jew.

Elsewhere, in an essay dedicated to showing how Greek "*philosophia*" should be accepted as "one of the world's major religious traditions,"[190] Smith exposits upon "reason" according to such a worldview. Here, he notes that "we participate in the divine insofar as our ideas are true – and more actively, our behavior rational."[191] As Such, "the intellect

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[187] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[188] Ibid., 596 (emphasis mine).

[189] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[190] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "*Philosophia* as One of the Religious Traditions of Humankind," in *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader*, ed. Kenneth Cracknell (New York: Oxford Oneworld, 2002), 83.

[191] Ibid., 76.

278

serves as our integrating principle," which is both social and individual. In terms of the

social, "rationality is the link among persons in society, and the principle social order," and

in terms of the individual "*to behave rationally is moral* […]."[192] As such, Smith notes that

through the intellect the universe and our personal life become coherent, ordered, and

integrated. Smith thus declares: "*This is faith*."[193] Although Smith's assertion here is made

within an exposition of Greek "*philosophia*," because he states that he is trying to understand

his subject from a comparative religious standpoint of "self-understanding,"[194] there is no

reason not to accept this explanation as one of the ways that he conceptualizes faith.

Smith's concession, then, that "faith" is marked by reason is significant since his

entire theory of "religion" (or the non-existence thereof) as presented in his 1963 magnum

opus *The Meaning and End of Religion* is based upon a division between individual "faith"

and "cumulative tradition"[195]—or in Kantian terms between *pure moral religion* and

historical faith. Thus, in *The Meaning and End of Religion* Smith states:

> My faith is an act that *I* make, myself, <u>naked</u> before God. Just as there is no such thing as
> Christianity (or Islam or Buddhism) […] so there is no generic Christian faith; no 'Buddhist
> faith', no 'Hindu faith', no 'Jewish faith'. There is only my faith, and yours […]. We are all
> persons, clustered in mundane communities, no doubt, and labeled with mundane labels but,
> so far as transcendence is concerned, encountering it each directly, personally […].[196]

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[192] Smith, "*Philosophia*," 76 (emphasis mine).

[193] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[194] Ibid., 83. Indeed earlier in the essay, Smith connects Greek humanism with Christianity and "Western life" (ibid., 73).

[195] Smith defines these: "By 'faith' I mean personal faith […]. By 'cumulative tradition' I mean the entire mass of overt objective data that constitute the historical deposit, as it were, of the past religious life of the community in question: temples, scriptures, theological systems, dance patterns, legal and other social institutions, conventions, moral codes, myths, and so on […]." Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 156-7.

[196] Ibid. (underline mine).

In Kant the terms are reversed (i.e., personal religion and the historical faiths), but the

rhetorical structure is almost identical:

> *Differences in religion*: an odd expression! Just as if one spoke of different *moralities*. No doubt there can be different kinds of historical *faiths*, though these do not pertain to religion, but only to the history of the means used to promote it, and these are the province of learned investigation; the same holds of different religious *books* (Zendavest, the Vedas, Koran, and so on). But there is only a single *religion*, valid for all men in all times. Those [faiths and books] <u>can thus be nothing more than the accidental vehicles of religion and can only thereby be different in different times and places</u>.[197]

Kant's statement here, that historical faiths and their scriptures "*can thus be nothing more*

than the accidental vehicles of religion," is again strikingly echoed in Smith who notes that a

"lively faith involves a limpid sincerity of relationship to one's fellow men, and to oneself,

and to the Creator or ground or totality of the universe. *For these things the formalities of*

one's religious tradition are at best a channel, and at worst a substitute."[198] Asad has indeed

noted that this statement of Smith's "is in essence the missionary's standpoint." As Asad

explains:

> The missionary cannot reform people unless they are persuaded that *the formal ways they live their life are accidental to their being*, channels for which other channels can be substituted without loss. And thus from one religion to another, or from living religiously to living secularly.[199]

Asad may very well go too far here by suggesting that Smith is indeed concerned to convert

others to either "one religion to another" or "to living secularly," since Smith was clearly

opposed to both types of "mission." Yet taken on a more rhetorical level, Asad calls out an

important mode in Smith of Kantian proselytization that argues that religious forms are, as

Kant sates above, "accidental vehicles." Such a universalist modality of "conversion"—i.e.,

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[197] Immanuel Kant, *To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 24 (underline mine).

[198] Smith, *The Meaning and End*, 129.

[199] Talal Asad, "Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith's 'The Meaning and End of Religion,' *History of Religions* 40, no. 3 (2001): 216-17 (emphasis mine).

from *exclusivist religiosity* to an *inclusive pluralism*—was not at all foreign to Smith's universalist missionary project, which as Kenneth Cracknell notes was concerned "to re-define the role of missionary […] as that of 'participation' in bringing into actual reality what until now was been an ideal reality only, that of a world wide community […]."[200]

From this utopian-humanist standpoint, Smith engages in a Kantian rhetoric of "conversion," or liberal reform, that seeks to persuade his readers that the outward forms of religion are secondary and thus should be amended to meet the universal demands of a global human community. This assertion can be seen most clearly in Smith's 1949 inaugural address, where he notes that in "*liberal circles* many are ready to admit that the present state of even their own religion, *as historically manifested*, could stand being chipped and polished here and there *to reveal better the essential core*."[201] Indeed, elsewhere Smith underscores that all modern reform, no matter if Western or "indigenous," is based upon "*the nature of liberal values* themselves,"

> such as the concern for every man in his individual personality, with its own distinctive capacity for growth, *its superlative freedom and inner responsibility, and for the rational consent of his mind, over against all systems and overt authority. These values, we believe, are in fact universal* […]."[202]

Thus, Smith's liberal project of Kantian reform outlined in his inaugural address and presented as the goal of "the science of religion" is to remove (by "chipping" and "polishing") the outer accretions of religion "*as historically manifested*"—i.e., legal traditions of "overt authority"—to reveal the "universal values" of Kantian autonomous ethics. While such a reform project is presented above in his 1949 inaugural lecture as

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[200] Cracknell, introduction to *Wilfred Cantwell Smith*, 23. This is also exemplified in Smith's theological call for Christians to relinquish exclusivism. See p. 282n205 below.

[201] Smith, "The Comparative Study," 46 (emphasis mine).

[202] Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 64 (emphasis mine).

something more or less restrained, i.e., simply chipping and polishing "here and there to reveal better the essential core," in the closing remarks of the same address Smith puts it in more absolute terms. Here, Smith notes that if "modern enlightened man […] *is to have any religion at all*" it must be consonant with "his developed inner standards of truth (scientific and *rational*), beauty, and the rest, and that is of *universal validity* […]."[203] Smith continues to note that "[i]n looking for the creation of not only new but *better, fuller, truer* developments of the religious traditions which we know, *one must* think in terms of loyalty *only to universal ideals* […]."[204] Again, the Kantian recourse to universal validity in terms of transcendental reason is clear. For Smith, like Kant, religion should be made "better, fuller, truer," not by loyalty to heteronomous tradition, but to rational and universally valid ideals.[205]

Returning once more to Smith's above equation between "*Sunni and Sufi; the Law and mysticism*," it is thus clear that not only is there a binary implied between *heteronomous blind submission* (i.e., Sunni) and *autonomous reason and morality* (i.e., Sufi), there is also the analogous binary intimated between the Kantian cloak of *history* and the "naked" faith of *universal* reason—as Smith states above: "My faith is an act that *I* make, myself, naked before God." Indeed, in his seminal work *Islam in Modern History*, Smith states:

> Sufism differs from the classical Sunni *Weltanschauung* radically; and <u>not least in its attitude to history</u>, the temporal mundane. <u>It stresses the individual rather than society, the eternal rather than the historical,</u> God's love rather than His power, and the state of man's heart rather than behavior. <u>It is more concerned that one's soul be pure than one's actions be</u>

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[203] Smith, "The Comparative Study," 60 (emphasis mine).

[204] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[205] In practical terms, Smith's insistence upon the "imperative" of all Christians to relinquish the traditional theology of Christian exclusivism for the sake of a world community is a compelling example. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Exclusivist Position is Theoretically Difficult," in *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader*, 207-213.

correct. Some Sufis thought the Law unimportant. Most regarded it as a private discipline guiding the person towards transcendent fulfillment, and paid little heed to its function in ordering society, in marshaling history into a prescribed pattern.[206]

While the historical and discursive inaccuracy of such a statement has already been discussed in chapter 1,[207] here the important point is Smith's Kantian separation of Sufism as a purported autonomous "authentic" modality of faith from the heteronomous modes of Sunni Islam, history, and law. From this Kantian view of Sufism it is thus not surprising that in the same work Smith (rightly) notes: that "every major Islamic reformer of the modern age shows deep Sufi influence."[208] Yet, he further states:

> In a world in which *the extant Law as a formal system* could seem a somewhat obsolescent method of bringing persons vividly face to face with the divine, some might argue that *Sufism provides an inescapable factor in any refreshened version of the faith*.[209]

While this statement is clearly structured as tentative, its construction of Sufism within the context of reform as a modern modality of "refreshened faith" against an "obsolescent" "formal system" of "Law" is aligned with Smith's more categorical contentions above and their Kantian autonomous model of religious reform in opposition to heteronomous tradition.

Indeed, not only does Smith juxtapose heteronomous Semitic revelation with Greek autonomous reason, as noted above, he also contrasts "classical Arabic civilization" and Islam with Greek humanism. Thus, Smith states:

> Classical Arabic civilization adopted the rationalist tradition of Greek philosophy and science up to a limited point, *but refused altogether the humanist tradition of Greek art and poetry*; and that tradition never penetrated Muslim society. *Again, religiously Islam repeats many of the basic doctrines of Christianity but not the humanist one; it rejected and still rejects with all the force and even horror that it can muster the affirmation that God Himself can best be*

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[206] Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 37.

[207] Chapter 1 builds upon Carl Ernst's and Omid Safi's critiques of such an Orientalist view that attempts to dissociate Sufism from socio-political concerns and frameworks of power. See chapter 1, pp. 31, 35-36, passim.

[208] Smith, *Islam in Modern History,* 56.

[209] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

known in a human embodiment. A statue of Praxiteles, which seeks the perfection of beauty in the human form, and a doctrine of incarnation, which portrays God there, *provide foundations on which the West could and did build a humanist movement but which are not immediately available to Islam.*[210]

Smith here importantly rehearses the discursive practices of the nineteenth century European romance with ancient Greece. As Masuzawa notes, it was the Greek "*felicitous culmination of the aesthetic and the rational* that was believed to be the origin of virtually everything that was true, good, beautiful, and therefore universal."[211] Unlike the purported Indo-Persian origins discussed in chapter 3, in this particular metanarrative, the essence of Christianity (as opposed to its historical origins) "is not to be traced back to Palestine as one of the many Jewish messianic sects; rather, *Christianity emerged from the far richer soil of the late Hellenic world* […]."[212]

Thus, like Pfleiderer's above assertion that Islam's "immutable character" of absolute voluntarism could never accept rationalism, Smith argues that Greek philosophy never took hold in the "Islamic world" where "*theology itself was suspect.*"[213] Indeed, Smith remarks:

> it is interesting to speculate whether the whole spread of Islām in the Near East and its overthrow of Christianity may not be partially viewed as broadly a reassertion of *the Semitic mind* rejecting a religion that, being Hellenically interpreted, *it could never quite appreciate.*[214]

Yet, for Smith, this purported "Semitic" rejection of Greek humanism somehow did not carry over to Sufism, which according to Smith has a tradition of humanism "from which

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[210] Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 303-304 (emphasis mine).

[211] Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 189.

[212] Ibid., 191.

[213] Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 303 (emphasis mine).

[214] Ibid., 303n2. Similarly, Smith asserts regarding the Syriac Christian conversion to Islam in the middle of the first millennium C. E. "[O]ne is tempted to speculate," Smith notes, "whether the Semitic-speaking group perhaps never did quite understand Christian doctrine in its Greek metaphysical forms, in general, and theories of the incarnation in particular." Smith, "*Philosophia*," 73-4.

a contribution to liberalism could be drawn […]."[215] The reason for this was that Smith did not associate the highest forms of Sufism with his above category of "*the Semitic mind*"; rather, Sufism was properly an Indo-Persian tradition that shared with Greece a humanist tradition of art and poetry. As Smith notes, "*The Arabs did not have the creativity* […] to produce Ṣūfī poets of the Persian quality and depth […]," which may explain "the Arab world's adopting Sufism less fully than the Persians, Turks, and Indians have done—in addition, of course, *to more obvious and straightforward reasons such as the Arab's greater closeness to classical Islam*."[216] Indeed, Smith therefore wonders whether the intellectual expression of "an Ibn al-'Arabī *can in the nature of the case be as adequate an expression of the truth* that the mystics have grasped, *as the artistic expression* of a Rūmī."[217] Smith's implication here—i.e., that Ibn 'Arabi's thought, as profound as it was, could never be "*as adequate an expression of the truth*" as Rumi because it lacked the artistic expression of the Persian poetic tradition (i.e., a humanist tradition like that of the ancient Greeks)—echoes presuppositions in the Western study of Sufism that were commonly held up through the first half of the twentieth century.

Henry Corbin, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Ibn 'Arabi's Persian "Conversion"

The first line of Reynold Nicholson's chapter on the celebrated Arab poet ʿUmar Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 1235) in his critically acclaimed *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* reads: "One of the deepest differences between Arabs and Persians shows itself in the extent and character of

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[215] Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 55 (emphasis mine).

[216] Ibid., 34n31 (emphasis mine). Elsewhere, in the context of the Islamic movement in India, Smith claims that Sufis spread Islam through "men's hearts," in opposition to "political power," and as such "expressed a profound and universalist theistic humanism." Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), 184.

[217] Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 34n31 (emphasis mine).

the mystical poetry of each people."[218] Nicholson goes on to note that while Persian poetry is "genuinely mystical in spirit," Arab poetry seldom possesses "the note" of mysticism.[219] "The main reason," for such a disparity Nicholson avers, "lies in *racial endowment*. The Arab *has no such passion for an ultimate principle of unity* as has always distinguished the Persians and Indians."[220] Thus, according to Nicholson, Ibn 'Arabi was "a great theosophist rather than a poet," although he was among the few who did excel in the stilted and "ambiguous style" of Arabic poetry.[221] Even though Nicholson ranked Ibn al-Fāriḍ as the "supreme master" of this style over Ibn 'Arabi, he still noted that the form of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetry "as well as in the individuality of his *spiritual enthusiasm* displays *the narrower and tenser genius of the Semite*."[222] While it is clear Nicholson paid Ibn 'Arabi the respect he felt he deserved as perhaps the foremost Arab theosophist known to history, he considered his metaphysics to be muddled with "mystical phantasies struggling to clothe themselves with forms of logic."[223] Thus, when Nicholson claims that Ibn 'Arabi "influenced" some ideas expressed by Rumi in his *Masnavī*, this should in no way be taken as an assertion of their spiritual equality.[224]

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[218] Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 162. As late as 1975, Annemarie Schimmel would note that this chapter "is still the best introduction to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's art and thought." Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 274 n35.

[219] Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 163-64.

[220] Ibid., 163.

[221] Ibid., 164.

[222] Ibid., 164, v (emphasis mine).

[223] Ibid., 88.

[224] The question of Ibn 'Arabi's so-called "influence" on Rumi is just one component of a broader scholarly debate over the actual or discursive relationship between them and their work. As William Chittick has shown, Nicholson's assertions of "influence" are not based on evidence, but simply rely upon purported conceptual similarities that can be found in Sufi works predating Ibn 'Arabi and his thought. See William Chittick, "Rūmī

However, the relegation of Ibn ʿArabi's mysticism in nineteenth century racialist terms as ultimately inferior *because* Semitic, as reflected in Nicholson and Smith above, would shift under the discursive weight of Henry Corbin (d. 1978) and Frithjof Schuon (d. 1998). Importantly though, this new perspective would not challenge such racial stereotypes, which continue to inform the discourse of reasonable Sufism today. Rather, the shift would occur from another and seemingly more Kantian discursive approach, i.e., through the "throwing off" of Ibn ʿArabi's Arab-Semitic history.

In his widely influential 1958 monograph on Ibn ʿArabi (based upon two separate articles published in the *Eranos Yearbook* in 1955 and 1956), Corbin de-Arabizes and reframes Ibn ʿArabi according to Persianate terms through the construction of a "spiritual topography" between "Andalusia and Iran."[225] As a "pilgrim to the Orient," Ibn ʿArabi leaves behind his "earthly homeland" in the Arab (i.e., Sunni) Occident and emerges in the Persian (Sufi/Shīʿite) Orient as the spiritual equal of Rumi.[226] In so doing, Ibn ʿArabi "attained to the esoteric Truth," and as such passed *through and beyond the darkness of the Law and of the exoteric religion*."[227] As opposed to "the dogmatic believer," Corbin asserts that

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and *waḥdat al-wujūd*," in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rūmī*, ed. Amin Banani, Richard Hovannisian, and Georges Sabagh (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 97-104. For a presentation of the most current research regarding the historical connections between Rumi and Ibn ʿArabi see Omid Safi, "Did the Two Oceans Meet?: Connections and Disconnections between Ibn al-ʿArabī and Rūmī," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* 26 (1999): 55-88.

[225] Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ʿArabī*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 3. Originally published as *L'Imagination créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn ʿArabî* (Paris: Flammarion, 1958); and Part One, *Eranos-Jahrbücher* 24 (1955); and Part Two, *Eranos-Jahrbücher* 25 (1956).

[226] Corbin believed the term "Arab" should be rejected entirely in terms of referring to Ibn ʿArabi and his spiritual connection with the Iranian wisdom of Suhrawardī and Shīʿism in opposition to "Averroism." As such, Corbin models his metanarrative of Ibn ʿArabi as "a living exemplification of Suhrawardī's 'Recital of Occidental Exile.'" According to Corbin, both Ibn ʿArabi and Rumi "are inspired by the same theophanic sentiment," and their spiritual lineages "converge toward the symbol of an identical archetype." Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 16-20, 67, 71, 110.

[227] Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 67 (emphasis mine).

the "life of prayer" practiced in the spirit and according to the indications of Ibn 'Arabī represents *the authentic form* of a "process of individuation" *releasing the spiritual person from collective norms and ready-made evidences* and enabling him to live as a unique individual for and with his Unique God.[228]

Corbin's "conversion" of Ibn 'Arabi thus results in a discursive encapsulation of an "authentic" religious life where through the Jungian "process of individuation" the seeker gains autonomy by "releasing" the "collective norms" of "exoteric religion."

Such a depiction evokes Schuon's own conversion of Ibn 'Arabi through the naked Virgin detailed in chapter 3. Beginning roughly in 1965 and "the coming of the Holy Virgin," Schuon increasingly sought to de-Semitize Ibn 'Arabi through interpreting his thought according to Vedantic categories.[229] Here, the garment of the Virgin is removed as a symbol of "the throwing off" of "*the Religio formalis*," i.e., the exoteric religion.[230] As in Corbin above, Islam as a formal (i.e., statutory, heteronomous, historical, empirical, collective, etc.) religion is thus presented *as a veil* that Ibn 'Arabi removes or releases himself from. The mature result of this shift was Schuon's appropriately entitled 1980 work *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence* (*Le Soufisme: voile et quintessence*), in which Schuon denigrates "Sufi metaphysics" as tied to "*Arab or Muslim, or Semitic*" voluntarism and anti-intellectualism.[231] In *Sufism*, Schuon routinely criticizes Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics as representative of such a propensity—what Schuon refers to as "average Sufism," which is

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[228] Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 268.

[229] Frithjof Schuon, "Excerpts from Letters of the Shaykh," October 1981 (photocopy, unpublished Maryamiyya papers), 7. See chapter 3, pp. 212-15.

[230] See chapter 3, p. 212.

[231] Frithjof Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence: A New Translation with Selected Letters*, trans. Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge, and James S. Cutsinger ed. James S. Cutsinger Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 28 (emphasis mine). See chapter 3, p. 165.

"above all *servile in character*."[232] Indeed, in his forward to the 2006 edition of *Sufism*, Nasr notes that "in his earlier days" Schuon was "primarily concerned […] with the manifestations of Sufism in the Arab world and with such authorities as Ibn 'Arabi."[233] Nasr further recounts that after meeting Schuon in 1957 he introduced him to "Sufism in the Persian world," which Schuon enthusiastically embraced since by that time he "wanted to go beyond the limiting of Sufism to Ibn Arabian teachings as had become common among so many of the so-called Guénonians."[234] Nasr thus notes that "[h]enceforth, he began to read much Persian Sufi poetry in translation, especially Rumi, and the fruit of this study is reflected in *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*."[235]

Because Schuon and Corbin hold various definitions of suprarational "gnosis" as epistemologically ultimate—in opposition to discursive reason—the substantive content of their thought does not serve as an immediate example of the discourse of reasonable Sufism with which I am presently concerned. Yet, the *functional* parallels in discursive practice between the Kantian historical teleology of autonomous self-legislation in opposition to heteronomous religious form and the Schuonian and Corbinian constructions of Ibn 'Arabi are striking. As such, I will return to the implications of such parallels in the conclusion of this study. This being said, here it is important to note that the Corbinian (and later Schuonian) "conversion" of Ibn 'Arabi is pivotal as a supporting element in the Western discourse of reasonable Sufism. Since the mid 1960s, the popular Perennialist discourse of Nasr has helped to facilitate Ibn 'Arabi's transformation as a "reasonable" Sufi.

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[232] Schuon, *Sufism*, 102.

[233] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, forward to *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, viii.

[234] Ibid.

[235] Ibid.

While it should be said that Corbin did not subscribe to Perennialism and was apparently outspoken against the thought of René Guénon, he was professionally and personally associated with Nasr in Iran from the early1960s throughout the remainder of his life.[236] Although Nasr does not classify Corbin's thought as a "truly authentic" expression of Sufism, as he does Schuon's, since his Ph.D. dissertation Nasr has copiously and approvingly cited Corbin's work and has recently praised him as the first "European 'Persian philosopher.'"[237] Moreover, Nasr has expressed alignment with Corbin's approach to Ibn 'Arabi on several occasions.[238] In his chapter on Ibn 'Arabi in his 1964 work *Three Muslim Sages*, which cites Corbin over a dozen times (and Schuon over half a dozen), Nasr seems at one point to counter Corbin's above assertion that Ibn 'Arabi's "process of individuation" is a release "*from collective norms*" of exoteric religion. Here, Nasr claims that Ibn 'Arabi

> sought to transcend the exoteric level by penetrating into the heart of the exoteric rites and practices *which themselves are an integral aspect of religion and are revealed by "Heaven," and to which man must conform if his quest of the spiritual life is to be really fruitful*. It was through these formal, or exoteric, aspects of religion and not is spite of them that Ibn 'Arabī, like other Sufis, sought to reach the inner and universal meaning of the Revelation.[239]

[236] Nasr taught Islamic philosophy with Corbin in Iran at Tehran University and at the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, which Nasr founded in 1974 under the patronage of Farah Pahlavi and the Pahlavi regime. They also together attended "philosophical sessions" with the famous Iranian philosopher Muhammad Husayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981). See also Seyyed Hossein Nasr with Ramin Jahanbegloo, *In Search of the Sacred: A Conversation with Seyyed Hossein Nasr on His Life and Thought* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 87, 91-93, 95, 111.

[237] For Nasr's juxtaposition of Corbin with Schuon see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 15. Regarding Nasr's criticisms (i.e., Corbin's disavowal of René Guénon and Traditionalism), as well as praise, see Nasr, *In Search of the Sacred*, 92-93, 104.

[238] In *Three Muslim Sages*, Nasr cites Corbin copiously and expresses a reserved sympathy for Corbin's claim that Ibn 'Arabi's "secret" spiritual origins can be traced to "Shīʿite theosophy" and the "spiritual hermeneutics" of taʾwīl (see Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 26, 28-29, 67). Nasr states: "Sufism stands essentially above the Shīʿah-Sunnī division in Islam but with Ibn ʿArabī there are, in addition to these universal principles accepted by both Shīʿah and Sunnī esotericists, doctrines of a specifically Shīʿah character regarding the imamate and other related matters which make the question of his possible relations with Shīʿism a difficult one to solve." Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Ibn ʿArabī* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1964), 169 n87. See also Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 100n7. More recently, Nasr has commended Corbin's monograph on Ibn 'Arabi, despite Nasr's disagreements with Corbin regarding so-called issues of "orthodoxy"; see Nasr, *In Search of the Sacred*, 93. For Nasr's Schuonian notion of "orthodoxy" see chapter 2, p. 113-14.

[239] Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 117.

Yet, in the very next sentence Nasr *dramatically shifts the emphasis* of his above assertion, stating:

> Essentially, the "burning of images," or the rejection of the external and formal aspects of religion, means that one must first possess these images and formal aspects. One cannot reject what one does not possess. When Muḥyī al-Dīn and other Ṣūfīs *declared their independence of religious forms and rites*, they addressed a collectivity in which the observance of religious practices of all kinds was taken for granted […].[240]

Besides the apparent logical fallacy of this passage,[241] Nasr here precisely follows Corbin's (and similarly Schuon's) above claim: that Ibn 'Arabi ultimately passed "*through and beyond the darkness of the Law and of the exoteric religion*." In other words, when Ibn 'Arabi attained enlightenment, he burnt "the image" of formal Islam and shed the unnecessary garb of "collective norms." As such, Nasr asserts that Ibn 'Arabi, like other Sufis, declared an "independence of religious forms and rites." What evidence does Nasr cite to prove such an assertion? His only reference is by now familiar: Ibn 'Arabi's famous verses from the *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* that claim a heart "capable of every form" and "the religion of Love."[242] In a later essay, as cited in chapter 2, Nasr would refer to these same *Tarjumān* verses with an identical Corbinian assertion: "*The Sufi is one who seeks to transcend the world of forms*, to journey from multiplicity to Unity, from the particular to the Universal. […] *For him all forms become transparent, including religious forms* […]."[243]

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[240] Ibid.

[241] This argument is a reification fallacy; it is based upon a false analogy that reifies an abstract idea—what Alfred Whitehead dubbed a "fallacy of misplaced concreteness." Here, Nasr takes the standard trope for iconoclasm, i.e., "burning of images," that posits an "image" as an analogy for "external" religion. He then asserts that in order to burn an image, and analogously "reject the formal aspects of religion," one must first have it in hand to burn, and analogously one must first be "religious" in order to reject religiosity. Yet, this argument is false since religious forms can be rejected without ever having engaged them in the first place. See Alfred N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 64.

[242] Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 118.

[243] Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 146-7.

Returning to *Three Muslim Sages*, Nasr follows his above claim—that Ibn 'Arabi declared independence "of religious forms and rites"—by explaining that "it was by means of these practices and not in spite of them that he came to realize that the divinely revealed paths lead to the same summit and that *to have lived one religion fully is to have lived them all*."[244] Indeed, it was only seven years before that Schuon had written: "*to practice one religion is implicitly to practice them all*."[245] By echoing the Corbinian and Schuonian disavowal of religious form, Nasr thus liberates Ibn 'Arabi from his Arab "homeland" into the illumination of the Orient where he could finally attain to, in the words of Nicholson above, a "*passion for an ultimate principle of unity*," which "has always distinguished the Persians and Indians." Thus, in *Three Muslim Sages*—his first Harvard University Press publication—Nasr sounds a clarion call that would prove emblematic of the discourse of reasonable Sufism itself: "All attempts at a profound rapprochement with the other religions made by Muslims today can and *should be based* on the rich foundations prepared by Ibn 'Arabī and Rūmī."[246]

While I have already explored the Perennialist response to such a call in chapter 2, in what remains I look at how echoes of Nasr's appeal continue to reverberate within a discursive path anticipated above by W. C. Smith in his 1949 inaugural lecture at McGill and throughout his academic career. If "modern enlightened man […] *is to have any religion at all*," Smith had asserted, it needs to conform to a rational standard of truth "that is of *universal validity*." It was in the likeness of such a universal Kantian ideal—imagined as a

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[244] Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 118.

[245] Frithjof Schuon, *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, ed. James S. Cutsinger, trans. Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge, and James Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 20. Originally published as *Sentiers de Gnose* (*La Colombe*, 1957).

[246] Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 117 (emphasis mine).

mode of Greco-Christian humanism—that Smith conceived of Sufism. The post-9/11

environment would prove an ideal matrix for the discursive appropriation of such reasonable

Sufism as a perfect foil to Western civilizational superiority.

Bernard Lewis, Sufism, and the Kantian Religiosity of "Judeo-Christian" Civilization

When Bernard Lewis invoked Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi at a conference hosted by the

International Security Program of the Nixon Center in Washington, D.C. on October 24,

2003, much had changed geopolitically since the end of the Cold War.[247] Only half a year

prior, the US had invaded Iraq as the latest phase in a massive global military offensive post-

9/11 (i.e., "the Global War on Terror"), which by then extended from America into Africa,

Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.[248] In 2004, the proceedings of the Nixon Center

conference were published in the tellingly entitled report "Understanding Sufism and its

Potential Role in US Policy."[249]

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[247] The Nixon Center is a Washington-based public policy think tank that was established by former President Richard Nixon in 1994 as the Nixon Center for Peace and Freedom. It was renamed the Center for the National Interest in 2011. See "The Nixon Center; Nixon Center Becomes Center for the National Interest," *Politics & Government Business* March 24, 2011, 68. As John Trumpbour notes, the Nixon Center famously sponsored a seminar on "Megaterrorism" in 1996, and it now "regularly identifies resurgent Islam as one of grave danger to global stability." John Trumpbour, "The Clash of Civilizations: Samuel P. Huntington, Bernard Lewis, and the Remaking of Post–Cold War World Order in *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy*, ed. Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells (New York : Columbia University Press, 2003), 94

[248] The precipitous collapse of the World Trade Center buildings on September 11, 2001 was matched by an equally precipitous instigation of "the Global War on Terror" announced by then President George W. Bush on September 20, 2001. By the time the US preemptively invaded Iraq on March 19, 2003, there were multiple US theater-level military operations deployed throughout the world including those in Afghanistan, the Mediterranean, the Philippines, the Horn of Africa, and Georgia. See Gregory W. Morgan, "Global War on Terror," and James C. Bradford, "Enduring Freedom, Operation, Coalition Navel Forces," in *The Encyclopedia of Middle East Wars: The United States in the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq Conflicts*, vol. 2, ed. Spencer C. Tucker (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 487, 415-16.

[249] The report begins by stating that the Nixon Center is "[c]ommitted to the analysis of policy challenges to the United States through the prism of the American national interest [. . .]." Zeyno Baran ed., "Understanding Sufism and its Potential Role in US Policy," *Nixon Center Conference Report* (Washington, D.C.: The Nixon Center, 2004).

The 2003 Nixon Center conference on Sufism and US policy was notable for the

nexus of diverse institutions and voices present, including a group of religious studies

scholars from several American universities,[250] members of a prominent American Sufi

order,[251] policy experts,[252] and unnamed "representatives from various US government

agencies."[253] As the report notes, the "highlight of the conference" is a full transcript of

Lewis's keynote discussion. Lewis, who is Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at

Princeton University, is introduced in the report as a "renowned author" who has "advised

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[250] In addition to Bernard Lewis (discussed below), the religious studies scholars are listed as Dr. Timothy J. Gianotti, Department of Religious Studies, University of Oregon; Dr. Zeki Saritoprak, Department of Religious Studies, John Carroll University; Dr. Alan Godlas, Department of Religion, University of Georgia; and Dr. Mohammad Faghfoory, Department of Religion, George Washington University. See Baran, "Understanding Sufism," 1-5, 7-13.

[251] I.e. Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, the leader of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order, and Dr. Hedieh Mirahmadi, then executive director of its non-profit organization connected to the order, i.e., the Islamic Supreme Council of America (ISCA). It should be noted here that both Mirahmadi and the editor of the Nixon Center Report, Zeyno Baran, are contributing members of the hawkish American foreign policy interest group, the *Committee on the Present Danger* (CPD), whose mission is "to educate free people about the threat that militant Islamism poses to the United States and the free world […]." The introduction to the Nixon Center report states that "Shaykh Kabbani […] was the first Muslim leader to warn the United States about the imminent threat posed by Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda terrorist network […]. Shaykh Kabbani is a tireless promoter of moderate, traditional Islam and a staunch opponent of radical Islamism." This refers to Kabbani's oft-mentioned remarks in front of a US State Department Forum entitled "the Evolution of Extremism" held on January 7, 1999 where he warned of an imminent nuclear threat from an army of suicide bombers funded by bin Laden and armed with miniaturized nuclear warheads. He also famously asserted that 80% of American mosques, and the majority of US Muslim non-profit humanitarian aid organizations, had been taken over by extremist ideology and that such ideology "has been spread to 80% of the Muslim population […]." Since 1999, Kabanni's remarks have played a role in anti-Muslim political agendas—most prominently in New York Representative, and former Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, Peter King's heavily politicized campaign against American Muslim "radicalization," which has resulted in five separate congressional hearings. In 2011, in the run up before the first of these hearings, King directly cited Kabbani's 1999 testimony, claiming that "over 80 percent of the mosques in this country are controlled by radical imams." See Glenn Kessler, "Peter King's claim about radical Muslim imams: Is it true?" *The Washington Post* (March, 10, 2011) www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/post/king-unsure-if-claim-that-80-percent-of-us-mosques-run-by-radical-imans-is-correct/2011/03/09/ABfpMzP_blog.html. An original transcript of Kabbani's 1999 remarks can be found on the ISCA website. See "Islamic Extremism: A Viable Threat to U.S. National Security" www.islamicsupremecouncil.org/media-center/domestic-extremism/63-islamic-extremism-a-viable-threat-to-us-national-security.html. For the CPD's mission statement quoted above see www.committeeonthepresentdanger.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=54.

[252] Listed as Dr. Charles Fairbanks, Director of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University and Alex Alexiev, Senior Fellow at the Center for Security Policy. Baran, "Understanding Sufism," 7.

[253] Baran, "Understanding Sufism," 23.

policymakers at all levels of the US government *on ways to constructively engage Muslims*."[254]

In his introductory talk, Lewis sets out to synthesize the preceding discussions on Sufism in terms of "foreign policy, national security and international relations."[255] After discussing a perceived historical difference between a European Christian interest in Islamic scholarship and the relative lack of the inverse, along with an explanation of the powerful influence of Wahhabism,[256] Lewis turns his attention to Sufism, and states: "There are *poems* by Rumi, by Ibn Arabi *in Persian and Turkish* which indicate that all the religions are basically the same […]."[257] In accord with the nineteenth century Orientalist preoccupation with Sufi poetry discussed above, Lewis highlights "poems" here as a distinguishing mark of Rumi's and Ibn 'Arabi's universalism. While, Persian is of course correctly associated with Rumi, Lewis significantly frames Ibn 'Arabi's poetry as seemingly written in Turkish and not in its original Arabic. Here again, Ibn 'Arabi is "converted" from an Arab Semite to *the almost European*, i.e., Turk.

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[254] Cliff Kupchan, introduction to "Understanding Sufism," i (emphasis mine). Not only has Lewis earned high praise in academia—the *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing* calling him "the most influential" and eminent scholar in the "liberal tradition in Islamic historical studies"—but after 9/11 Lewis became one of the US government's foremost advisors on foreign policy and the "war on terror." See Nicholas Lemann, "The Next World Order: The Bush Administration may have a brand-new doctrine of power," *The New Yorker* April 1, 2002. See also Trumpbour, "The Clash of Civilizations," 92; and Mamdani, *Good Muslim*, 20. See also See Martin Kramer, "Lewis, Bernard," in *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, vol. 1 (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), 719.

[255] These included socio-political history, religious doctrines, and the intersection between Western modernity and the rise of fundamentalism, i.e., "Wahhabism," (esp. in Eurasia). Baran, "Understanding Sufism," 16.

[256] This, according to Lewis, was "due to a confluence of circumstances" including the conversion of the house of Saud to Wahhabism, the establishment of the Saudi Kingdom, and the discovery of oil. Bernard Lewis, "Keynote Lunch Discussion," in Baran, "Understanding Sufism," 17-18.

[257] Ibid., 18 (emphasis mine).

Lewis thus notes that such a distinct Sufi doctrine of religious universality "is a profoundly important contribution" to current and future prospects of intercommunity relations. Lewis then goes on to explain the difference between Sufism and "standard" Islam by recourse to the Ten Commandments. He states:

> If you look at the Ten Commandments you will see that most of them are concerned with the relationship between human beings. *Only a small minority of commandments are concerned with relations between human beings and God*. Most of them are what you should not do to your fellow human beings. In standard Islamic texts, it is the other way around: it is mostly concerned with relations with God rather than relations with other human beings. *Sufism again brings significant change in this respect*. It is also highly concerned with one's actions towards other people, not just how you behave towards God.[258]

Here, it is important to pause and note that although the Jewish and Christian traditions have historically differed over the exact enumeration of the Decalogue, the first three (or four) commandments dealing with Divine-human relations not only preceded those addressing interhuman ones, but were assumed to *necessarily* have religious primacy.[259] Thus, while Lewis's assertion that the Decalogue is primarily concerned with interhuman over Divine-human relations *because* there are numerically more interhuman commandments is ostensibly logical, in Kantian fashion it inverts traditional Jewish and Christian interpretations that give primacy to the Divine-human commandments even though they are less in number. Indeed, it was only under the influence of Kant's subjective turn that Jewish and Christian scholars endeavored to interpret their ethical traditions "in a doctrine of man

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[258] Lewis, "Keynote Lunch Discussion," 18 (emphasis mine).

[259] Since antiquity there has been a variety of opinions regarding the exact content and enumeration of the Commandments. Rabbinic tradition considers the first commandment to be Ex 20:2, Dt. 5:6, while most Christian groups view it as a "prologue." There is a further difference of opinion between the Jewish tradition and various Christian groups as to how the remainder of the commandments are divided. Some, along with the Rabbinic tradition, only count the first three as governing Divine-human relations, while others count four. See S. M. Polan et al., "Commandments, Ten," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., vol. 4. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 7.

and only secondarily a doctrine of God."[260] As Nancy Levene notes, "the imitation of God

that, according to the Jewish and Christian Bibles, was to constitute the highest human end"

was ruled out by Kant who "bequeathed the notion that a true ethics is one that is

independent of any modifier […]. In his model, *it is the moral human being* I am to imitate in

my conduct […]."[261]

Yet, part of the rhetorical skill of Lewis's above assertion is that he neither refers to

Judaism nor to Christianity, but only *a particular interpretation* of the Decalogue against

"standard Islamic texts." In so doing, Lewis invokes the problematic post-World War II

category of a "Judeo-Christian" heritage against a homogenized Islamic textual tradition.[262]

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, in his famous 1990 article "The Roots of

Muslim Rage" Lewis openly sets Islam's irrational "religious culture" against the "heritage"

of "Judeo-Christian" civilization. As such, Lewis's above comparison of the Decalogue to

"standard Islamic texts" is strongly misleading, since instead of comparing Judaism and

Christianity to Islam, it compares Kantian autonomous morality (as post-World War II

"Judeo-Christian" *civilizational heritage*) against Islam as a premodern (and *pre-civilized*)

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[260] Vigen Guroian, "Differentiation in Christian Ethics," in *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, ed. William Schweiker (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 216, 219. Although the Ten Commandments do not appear in the Gospels in their entirety, in both Mark and Matthew Jesus identifies love of God and love of neighbor as the summation of the law and the prophets (Mk 12: 28-31 and Mt 22: 33-40). Yet, in both passages, love of God is given priority, and in Matthew Jesus calls the first "the greatest" commandment. S. M. Polan et al., "Commandments, Ten," 7-8.

[261] Nancy Levene, "From Law to Ethics . . . and Back," in *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, ed. William Schweiker (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 191-2 (emphasis mine). See also Shaul Magid, "Ethics Differentiated from the Law," Ibid., 176-77.

[262] As Carl Ernst notes, the vague category of "Judeo-Christian" overlooks the theological differences between each religious tradition "as well as the history of anti-Semitism (including the Holocaust)." Moreover, as Emran Qureshi and Michael Sells note, "Jews have contributed at least as much to the civilizations ruled by Islam as they have to those ruled by Christianity." See Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 119; and Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells, "Introduction: Constructing the Muslim Enemy," in *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy*, ed. Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 6.

heteronomous religion. Thus, in the very same way that Kant argues in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, as quoted above, that "the faith in question *cannot be faith that we can obtain God's favor or pardon by anything other than a pure moral attitude of will*," Lewis here argues that the Muslim focus on God is the problem. Similar to Kant's argument against the Jews, Lewis thus implies that unless Muslims turn away from their heteronomous tradition of worship and obedience (i.e., "standard Islamic texts") and instead focus on *an assumed lack* of human ethics, they will not be able to enter the civilized world. As Mack notes, it was precisely such Kantian discourse that essentialized "the Jewish as the 'heteronomous'" and thus and set the stage for the nineteenth century German stigmatization of Jews *as non-modern* and thus politically corruptive.[263] Thus, in the same way that "*Kant grounded the immutability of the Jews in their religion*,"[264] Lewis grounds a similar immutability of Muslims in Islam.

Yet Sufism, for Lewis, "*brings significant change in this respect*." Like the teachings of the Ten Commandments, Sufism is "highly concerned with one's actions towards other people […]." Thus, Sufism is for Lewis most concerned with interpersonal morality, rather than obedience to God, and as such is more like the secular-liberal modernity of "Judeo-Christian" civilization. Indeed, this Kantian construction of Sufism is fleshed out elsewhere in the Nixon Center report. In a panel on Sufi history and theology, it is reported that throughout Islamic history "[s]cholars of Islamic law demanded that Sufis follow *shariah,*

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[263] Mack, *German Idealism*, 39.

[264] Ibid., 40 (emphasis original).

but many Sufis saw the code as nonessential, choosing instead to use the rational capabilities which they believed the Quran advocated."[265] The report continues, noting:

> Sufis believe that the scripture encourages Muslims *to think and to use their reason to understand the meaning of creation*. Some Muslim intellectuals, however, followed the way of reason as recommended by the scripture. Therefore, an Islamic judiciary system and much of Islamic thought came into being as a result of these scholarly efforts. *Today, this tension continues in an extreme way as a struggle between Wahabism* [sic] *and Sufism.*[266]

This single passage is a strikingly concise and comprehensive example of the discourse of reasonable Sufism that I have attempted to adumbrate throughout this chapter. Here, rather than relying on their revealed law and scripture (i.e., Lewis's "standard Islamic texts"), Sufis rely on autonomous reason to understand reality. Yet, other "Muslim intellectuals" historically followed a heteronomous form of reason based upon the prescriptions of scripture. It was through such a heteronomous system of logic that Islamic law and science came into existence. These normative, historical modalities of Islam finally resulted in an internal "clash of civilizations," i.e., a struggle between fanatical Islam (i.e., Wahhabism) and Sufism. In other words, as a result of the application of a Kantian metaphysics of autonomous reason, Sufis "threw off" the historical accretions of their "ancient cult" and attained to a pure rational religion, while the rest of the Muslims clung to the forms and prescriptions of their historical tradition and thus became increasingly violent and fanatical.

Besides this clear rehearsal of the Kantian teleology of pure rational religion, this passage also exemplifies a Kantian understanding of hermeneutics, which is implied in Lewis's passage above. Here, the Sufis—as representative of a Kantian autonomous subjectivity—are not simply juxtaposed with heteronomous religious subjects (i.e., Muslim

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[265] Attributed to Dr. Zeki Saritoprak, John Carroll University, "Understanding Sufism," 4.

[266] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

intellectuals/jurists/Wahhabis), but they are endowed with *a particular hermeneutic* of reading scripture based upon pure autonomous reason. Just as Kant asserts that all meaning originates from the subject and not the object, he similarly denies scripture any controlling function in determining scriptural meaning.[267] Within a section in *Religion* entitled "Church Faith Has Pure Religious Faith as Its Highest Interpreter," Kant importantly asserts that "the predisposition to moral religion lay hidden in human reason […]."[268] Thus, although the "*first crude manifestations*" of historical revelations "*aimed merely at their use in the service of God* […]," there can be in "these inventions" something of the pure moral religion.[269] Nevertheless, all such "alleged revelations" *must* be interpreted "to yield a meaning that harmonizes with *the universal practical rules* of a pure rational religion."[270] Thus, Kant states:

> To ourselves this interpretation, in view of the text (of the revelation), may often seem forced, and *may often actually be forced*; and yet *this interpretation must* […] *be preferred* to a literal interpretation that either contains within itself absolutely nothing for morality, or perhaps even acts counter to morality's incentives.[271]

Such a hermeneutic is simply a consequence of the Kantian Copernican turn to the subject. In other words, Kant's program of universal religious reform asserts that instead of expounding reason and morality according to scripture, one should expound scripture according to

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[267] This marks a break with the hermeneutics of Spinoza, who allowed the text to remain the primary source of truth, but only in an entirely different modality than was customarily accepted as authentic. As Yovel notes, for Spinoza "[t]he actual content of the Bible is not to be determined by an a priori idea (theological or philosophical) to which the meaning of the text is then adjusted. Rather, the basis for research is the document itself, from whence one can proceed to discover a general pattern." This empirical approach to hermeneutics is a nascent form of modern textual criticism, but geared to discover the true meaning inherent in the text. Kant however, does not share Spinoza's faith in nature or that of scriptural meaning. See Yovel, *Spinoza*, 17.

[268] Kant, *Religion*, 123.

[269] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[270] Ibid., 120 (emphasis mine).

[271] Kant, *Religion*, 120-21.

universal principles of reason.[272] The discourse of the Nixon Center report frames Sufism

precisely within such a Kantian autonomous hermeneutical practice—i.e., the Sufis *"use their*

reason to understand the meaning of creation," while the remaining Muslims (who are by

default extremists) follow *"the way of reason as recommended by the scripture."* As Lewis

implies above, the Kantian hermeneutical tradition is in fact part of the heritage of "Judeo-

Christian" humanism, which reads the Ten Commandments according to the universal

principles of autonomous morality rather than an implied "fanatical" adherence to the

"standard Islamic" textual focus on an external God.

Educating the Muslim Subject: Sufism, Ibn 'Arabi, and the "Occidental" Face of God

During the same year that the Nixon Center conference on Sufism was held, another

global policy think tank conceptualized a similar discourse of reasonable Sufism. As

mentioned in the introduction above, the RAND Corporation issued three reports after 9/11

attempting to explain the internal struggle within Islam and encourage "greater democracy,

modernity, and compatibility with the contemporary international world order."[273] The first

2003 report, *Civil and Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, Strategies*, begins by noting

that "[t]he Islamic world is involved in a struggle to determine its own nature and values

[…]," and the US must "identify appropriate partners and set realistic goals and means to

encourage its evolution in a positive way."[274] "*It is no easy matter to transform a major*

world religion," the report concedes: "If 'nation-building' is a daunting task, '*religion-*

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[272] In response to the assertion that "*we ought to have no holier morality than the Bible,*" Kant rhetorical asks "whether morality must be construed in accordance with the Bible or, rather, the Bible in accordance with morality"? For Kant, the clear answer is the latter. See Kant, *Religion*, 121n167.

[273] Benard, *Civil and Democratic Islam*, x.

[274] Ibid., iii (emphasis mine).

building' is immeasurably more perilous and complex."[275] RAND thus identifies "Sufi

Islam" as one such "appropriate partner" to help in the "positive" (re)building of Islam.

The 2003 RAND report stakes out its place in the discursive genealogy of reasonable

Sufism by portraying "the Sufi" as a Kantian *homo modernus* in line with the modern

religion of conscience. As an "open, intellectual interpretation of Islam," Sufism is thus

placed within the category of "modernism" (as opposed to traditionalism, fundamentalism,

and secularism).[276] Of all such categories, the report claims that modernism "is most

congenial to the values and the spirit of modern democratic society."[277] The RAND report

continues to describe modernism in Kantian teleological terms as including "the *necessity* to

depart from, modify, and selectively ignore elements of the original religious doctrine."[278] To

reinforce this framework, the report then expresses the "modern" hermeneutical position that

Muslims should emulate. Instead of insisting (absurdly) that people live according to the

"manner of the Biblical patriarchs [...,]" the report relates that "*we allow our vision of

Judaism's or Christianity's true message to dominate over the literal text*, which *we regard

as history and legend*."[279] Like the Nixon Center report, this communal assertion of a "Judeo-

Christian" interpretive tradition precisely expresses the Kantian hermeneutical method,

which as discussed above claims that all scripture is simply the "crude" historical

manifestation of the human moral predisposition and thus *must* be interpreted "to yield a

meaning that harmonizes with the universal practical rules of a pure rational religion."

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[275] Benard, *Civil and Democratic Islam*, 3 (emphasis mine).

[276] Ibid., 46.

[277] Ibid., 37.

[278] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[279] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

One of RAND's recommendations to help instill such a modern hermeneutic is to "strongly" encourage "*Sufi influence over school curricula*, norms, and cultural life […]."[280] As if in response to this prescription, an essay entitled "Imaginal Transformation and Schooling" was published in a 2008 scholarly volume dedicated to the mythopoetic hermeneutical tradition in curriculum studies. Here, James Bradbeer deploys a Corbinian inspired reading of Ibn 'Arabi to "illuminate" his and his colleague's teaching practice at an Islamic secondary school in Melbourne, Australia.[281] Bradbeer believes that Ibn 'Arabi's conception of "God authentically experienced" in opposition to the God created in the formal religions can serve as an appropriate Islamic model for "mythopoesis and mythopoetic transformation" in the modern classroom.[282] Here, Bradbeer juxtaposes the idea of an "authentic" God who resides in the heart with Corbin's reading of Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on belief, i.e., what Corbin calls "the God created in the faiths."[283] As I argue in chapter 1, what Corbin and others interpret as "faiths" or "religions" here is an anachronistic translation of "beliefs" (*i'tiqādāt*).[284] In such interpretations, Ibn 'Arabi's *intra*-religious critique on the

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[280] Ibid., 46 (emphasis mine).

[281] Although Abdul Ghafoor Abdul Raheem is generously listed as the essay's second author, Bradbeer writes in the first person and simply refers to Abdul Raheem's ideas and quotes his statements. Throughout the chapter, rather than a second author, Abdul Raheem is presented as Bradbeer's intellectual interlocutor and confidant. James Bradbeer and Abdul Ghafoor Abdul Raheem, "Imaginal Transformation and Schooling," in *Pedagogies of the Imagination*: *Mythopoetic Curriculum in Educational Practice*, ed. Timothy Leonard and Peter Willis (New York: Springer, 2008), 148. Bradbeer is the author of the "mythopoetic" exploration of curriculum, *Imagining Curriculum*, in which he mentions his debt to Corbin's work on Ibn 'Arabi and Corbin's claim that imagination "provides a secure foundation for the radical autonomy of the individual […]." See James Bradbeer*, Imagining Curriculum: Practical Intelligence in Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998), 55.

[282] Bradbeer, "Imaginal Transformation," 141, 149.

[283] This is Corbin's translation of *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq fī al-i'tiqādāt* or "the Real created in the beliefs," which is analogous to "the divinity of beliefs" (*al-ilāh al-mu'taqad*). Bradbeer, "Imaginal Transformation," 141.

[284] See chapter 1, pp. 42-48; and 42n68.

rational limitation of the divine in Islamic theological speculation easily slides into a modern

universalist position against religious exclusivity and exoteric religion.[285]

Yet, in the discourse of reasonable Sufism, Ibn ʿArabi's idea of the divine created in

"the beliefs" is taken one step further to argue for autonomous reason against irrational

religious beliefs, such as "God" itself. Thus, Bradbeer notes that in the "realm of imaginal

realities" of Ibn ʿArabi "'God' was meaningful because it designated those elaborations of

mind in which humanity—even 'ordinary' humanity—discovers what humanity is for

itself."[286] Here Bradbeer echoes Kant, whose "central reflections on God," as Palmquist

notes, "ends up being channeled into *anthropology,* in an effort to help human beings

understand who we are and how <u>our lives should be lived in a religiously authentic way</u>."[287]

Thus, according to Bradbeer, the person who worships the "God created in the faiths"

remains veiled to the true God in themselves.[288]

As Bradbeer notes, "faith seems often to entail *a suspension of rationality*, *a setting

aside of one's powers, and a damn-it-all commitment to strange stuff*."[289] Here, Bradbeer

offers a concise Kantian conception of historical religion as *irrational*, *heteronomous*, and

based upon untrue myth. Bradbeer therefore implies that the commitment of his Australian

Muslim students to such heteronomous tradition keeps them from experiencing their

"authentic" selves: "There is an impulse in religious organizations," Bradbeer notes, "that

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[285] E.g., see Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 118.

[286] Bradbeer, "Imaginal Transformation," 152.

[287] Stephen Palmquist, introduction to *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, xvi (underline mine).

[288] Bradbeer, "Imaginal Transformation," 141.

[289] Ibid., 145 (emphasis mine).

runs counter to anyone ever becoming capable of anything as *oneself*."[290] Indeed, according to Bradbeer, "religious *belief* itself, so sacrosanct a conception in modern religiosity, may indeed *not* be the same thing as making oneself capable of God."[291] Thus, Bradbeer notes that the normative Islamic belief in a transcendent God has made it a heresy for Muslims "to explicate him." Echoing Pfleiderer and Smith above, Bradbeer thus asserts that "Islam has, therefore, *always frowned upon theology*."[292] "The fact of the matter," Bradbeer strikingly states, "*is that Islam had a problem with Allah, and still has*."[293]

Thus, after describing a recent school talk given by a local imam that "might have been delivered whole and entire in AD 1200" and "which the students attended *with flat docility* […]," Bradbeer contemplates what he views as an incongruity between the young "journeying" minds of his Western Muslim students and their servile attendance at the imam's premodern address.[294] As a discursive aid, Bradbeer offers a textbook Orientalist chart inspired by Joseph Campbell that compares "the eastern psyche […] with the western."[295] While the "orient" is said to represent "*Tradition*" and "*Faithful obedience*," the "occident" conversely symbolizes "*Revolution*" and "*Intelligent striving*."[296]

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[290] Bradbeer, "Imaginal Transformation," 144 (emphasis original).

[291] Ibid. (emphasis original).

[292] Ibid., 147 (emphasis mine).

[293] Ibid. (emphasis mine). This exceptional statement is reminiscent of Julian Baldick's equally striking assertion that the Qur'an "is important for the Muslim *more for what it is*, namely the uncreated speech of God, *than for what it actually says*." Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism* (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 26 (emphasis mine).

[294] Bradbeer, "Imaginal Transformation," 147 (emphasis mine).

[295] Ibid., 147.

[296] Ibid., 148 (emphasis mine).

Situating Ibn 'Arabi's account of a hadith asserting God's presence in the heart of the believer as "God authentically experienced," Bradbeer thus concludes that the hearts of his Australian Muslim students "contain the spiritual adventure of the occident." As such, Bradbeer exclaims that "their Lord, the one to be found there in the temple of the heart, the spiritual *Kaaba*, is occidental, too."[297] With no little irony, Bradbeer thus returns Ibn 'Arabi from his Corbinian Oriental pilgrimage to his "earthly homeland" in the Occident, only to further de-Semitize him in European terms—what Deleuze and Guattari identify as Eurohegemonic "facialization," i.e., the projection of "the White-Man face" on the non-European Other.[298]

Towards the end of his essay Bradbeer thus depicts Ibn 'Arabi as precisely representing the modern religion of conscience: "Ibn 'Arabi developed to its logical end point this idea of seeing God in the mirror of one's own soul: *the God to be found on the imaginal plane is*, one might say, *oneself*."[299] Thus, when Bradbeer finally asserts that "Ibn 'Arabi's conception *declares the curriculum*,"[300] he is (whether consciously or not) asserting a Kantian rhetoric of conversion geared to help his Muslim students *throw off* their historical (i.e., "oriental"/ Semitic) accretions of heteronomous "*Tradition*" and "*Faithful obedience*" and find within their "authentic" (i.e., "occidental") selves "*Revolution*" and "*Intelligent striving*" (i.e. Western reform and reason).

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[297] Ibid. (underline mine).

[298] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 178.

[299] Ibid., 152 (emphasis mine).

[300] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

Jeffrey Kripal, Ibn 'Arabi, and Kantian Reform as "Mystical Denial of Difference"

Around the same time of the publication of Bradbeer's above essay, the University of Chicago Press published *The Serpent's Gift: Gnostic Reflections on the Study of Religion* by the well-known comparativist and Indologist Jeffrey Kripal. Like Bradbeer's "mythopoetic" essay on Ibn 'Arabi and education, Kripal similarly invokes "the ethical, the mystical, and the mythical" in an attempt to engage the thought of premodern mystics, like that of Ibn 'Arabi, within postmodern frameworks of deconstruction.[301] While similar to the above discursive projects of liberal reform, *The Serpent's Gift* is notable for its *self-conscious* adoption of a Kantian humanist approach geared towards influencing global religious evolution. Like Graham who almost two centuries before beheld his own image as a European "free-thinker" in the mirror of Sufism, Kripal sees himself as a "(post)modern gnostic intellectual" reflected in the "contemporary mystical practice" of the deconstructive mysticism he elaborately constructs.[302]

At the start of his book, Kripal notes that he wants "to recover […] some of the mystical depths of our modern Enlightenment and its attending humanism."[303] Kripal situates this so-called recovery within what he calls a "Gnostic (Post)Modernity." According to Kripal, postmodernism itself "can be read as an extension or development of Kantian modernity" in that "what we call truth is really a function of the power and the perspective of the knower and not an accurate reflection of some 'objective' external reality independent of

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[301] Jeffrey J. Kripal, *The Serpent's Gift: Gnostic Reflections on the Study of Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 9-10.

[302] Ibid., 10, 11.

[303] Ibid., 11.

the human observer [...]."[304] It is from within this Kantian postmodernism that Kripal

engages what he calls "a kind of secularized or rationalized mysticism, that is, [...] a kind of

logos mystikos, or gnostic rationalism."[305]

Although Kripal asserts that the "critical study of religion" is based upon a "highly

developed secular sense," he suggests that the discipline of religious studies itself can be

regarded "as a modern mystical tradition":

> [T]he modern study of religion displays numerous qualities or dimensions *that can be
> classified as a kind of modern or postmodern "mysticism"* [...]. Put most simply, then,
> "mysticism" and the modern study of religion are inseparable because they are largely about
> the same set of modernist and now postmodernist convictions, forms of self-reflexivity, and
> *theoretical approaches to religious plurality.*[306]

In a move reminiscent of W. C. Smith's above humanistic embrace of the "science of

religion" to help world religions reveal their "*essential core,*" Kripal describes this "critical-

mystical" tradition of religious studies as a "hermeneutical practice that works in the here and

now to 'melt down' the dualisms of orthodoxy established to delay salvation, liberation, or

enlightenment interminably."[307] Thus, for Kripal "the critical study of religion is to religion

as mystical deconstruction is to orthodox creed, ritual, or law."[308]

In Kripal's postmodern "mystical" practice of religious studies, the "masters of

suspicion" of modern philosophy are invoked "as heroic figures *whose ideas are as*

necessary to mature religious faith as the disillusionments of childhood are to growing

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[304] Ibid., 8.

[305] Kripal, *The Serpent's Gift,*" 167.

[306] Ibid., 110 (emphasis mine).

[307] Ibid., 111.

[308] Ibid., 112.

up."[309] Once again we are confronted with the Kantian teleological metaphor of religious evolution and the growth of rational religion out of its immature childhood. Indeed, in a similar move to Bradbeer's Kantian call for an "authentic" expression of the rational self in opposition to "the God created in the faiths," Kripal states:

> Put mystically, the reductionistic methods of religious studies often function as apophatic techniques *to deconstruct a fraudulent demiurge posing as God*. They thus free us for *more genuine, more mature, and less dangerous forms of spirituality*. They tell us what "God" is *not* and how human, all too human, so many of our religious ideas truly are.[310]

Again, a Kantian teleological narrative of reform is clear: the formal religions and their purported ideas of "God" are untrue; in their place, a rational understanding of "religion" can provide a "more genuine," "mature," and "less dangerous" spirituality. Here, the Kantian hermeneutical understanding is proffered that "our religious ideas" are historical fictions that we have created. Thus, Kripal cites the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich's (d. 1965) insistence "on *the radical rationality* of mystical writers," and thus quotes Tillich's interpretation of "the category of mysticism as 'God fighting religion within religion'"—i.e., a Kantian pure rational religion *fighting* historical faith.[311]

According to Kripal, "such a mystical-critical rereading" of religious studies can be useful for "*the cross-cultural influence of religious systems toward a safer, more humane, and more religiously satisfying world*."[312] Kripal further defines this mode of religious

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[309] Ibid., 118 (emphasis mine).

[310] Kripal, *The Serpent's Gift*," 118 (emphasis mine).

[311] Ibid., 117-18.

[312] Ibid., 108 (emphasis mine). Defined in the Kantian/postmodern way above, Kripal asserts thus that "[h]istorians of religions […] are often closet mystics" (ibid., 109).

reform, which he claims is the "unacknowledged normative aim" of scholars of comparative

religion, as "*a kind of esoteric universal humanism*."[313] "In this gnostic light," it is possible

> to draw on the symbolic and ritual resources of a tradition *without being slavishly bound to it*
> […], to imaginatively internalize and unite the depths of other religious traditions in one's
> own mystical body and its erotic energies. *This is something similar to what Ibn al-'Arabi
> wrote toward in fourteenth-century* [sic] *Andalusia* […].[314]

Here, Ibn 'Arabi represents the Kantian transcendence of historical faith, upon which the

heteronomous Other is "*slavishly bound*." Following the Corbinian inspired French literary

critic Abdelwahab Meddeb, Kripal states that Ibn 'Arabi internalized all forms of belief

without reducing or discarding them

> in order to deconstruct the archaisms, criminal monstrosities, and gross contradictions of
> Islamic fundamentalism, a move that only furthers the point being made here, namely, that
> one of our best hopes for *cross-cultural influence* lies through our religions' mystical
> traditions and their radical hermeneutical practices and pluralistic sensibilities.[315]

Here, Ibn 'Arabi is invoked precisely as the representative of Kripal's "gnostic rationalism"

and as a vehicle of so-called "*cross-cultural influence*" through "radical hermeneutical

practices and pluralistic sensibilities." While we have already seen that Kripal positions such

"radical hermeneutics" and "pluralism" in a Kantian teleology of religious reform, Kripal

follows this statement with a fuller description of such reform in political terms.

Citing Meddeb and his Lewisian entitled work *The Malady of Islam*, Kripal asserts

that he follows Meddeb's embrace of "the broader historical context," which Kripal describes

as "*the rise of modernity and the Enlightenment and the internal failures of Islam to answer*

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[313] Kripal, *The Serpent's Gift*," 113.

[314] Ibid., 119.

[315] Ibid., 116 (emphasis mine).

or fully participate in them […]."[316] Kripal immediately notes how Meddeb "goes on to

develop a richly dialectical model of Islam as an intimate part of the West and its history."[317]

As such, Kripal asserts that in refusing to see Islam as separate from the West, Meddeb

enacts a "*mystical denial of difference.*"[318] Yet, Kripal's assertion of such an ostensibly

universal "*denial of difference*" within the "broader historical context" of the failure of

"Islam to answer or fully participate" in "the rise of modernity and the Enlightenment" is a

denial of history itself. Such a brand of essentializing pluralism, as Wendy Brown notes,

confirms "the superiority of the West" through a simultaneous depoliticization of "the effects

of domination, colonialism, and cold war deformations of the Second and Third Worlds" and

portrayal of "those living these effects as in need of the civilizing project of the West."[319]

Thus, Kripal's assertion of "mystical denial of difference" is a hegemonic Kantian

universalization of sameness. As the sociologist Ulrich Beck notes, in such universalist calls

for the dissolution of difference "*the other's voice is permitted entry only as the voice of*

sameness, as a confirmation of oneself, contemplation of oneself, dialogue with oneself."[320]

Here, Ibn 'Arabi is identified as having the same values and qualities as European Kantian

religious subjectivity, while his not-yet-liberated co-religionists are in need of the "cross-

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[316] Kripal, *The Serpent's Gift*," 116 (emphasis mine). Meddeb's work is an example of what Asad refers to as "[t]he modern discourse of crisis," which "depends on a particular form of diagnosis (radical social criticism) and proposes a particular kind of cure (emancipation from the sickness-producing past)." Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 231.

[317] Kripal, *The Serpent's Gift*, 116.

[318] Ibid., (emphasis mine).

[319] Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 185.

[320] Ulrich Beck, "The Truth of Others: A Cosmopolitan Approach," *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 3 (2004): 433 (emphasis mine).

cultural" influence of Kripal's "gnostic rationalism" to make Islam *"safer, more humane, and more religiously satisfying"*—not *necessarily* for Muslims, but for those who feel threatened by the existence of non-liberal Muslim beliefs and practice.

Conclusion: Ibn 'Arabi *qua* Father of Reasonable Sufism and the End of Semitic Islam

This chapter began by noting Steven Schwartz's 2008 invocation of Ibn 'Arabi in *The Other Islam* as "the earliest example of an illustrious, truly European Muslim […]."[321] Like the examples given above marking Ibn 'Arabi's rise as the master of reasonable Sufism, Ibn 'Arabi is once again de-Semitized—his Arab identity effaced through an anachronistic identification of Muslim Spain with Western Europe. Ibn 'Arabi thus serves as the progenitor of reasonable Sufism itself, which is variously represented as "Christianized" and "European" Islam.[322] In Schwartz's metanarrative, Ibn 'Arabi transmits "the beauty of his own personality" to Rumi.[323] Yet, the discourse of reasonable Sufism is so totalizing in *The Other Islam*, that even Rumi ultimately loses his connection to Persia or Seljuk Anatolia. Instead, Rumi's toponymic association with Anatolian Rome, or "Rūm," is purposefully interpreted as "a man living in a place still filled with Christian influence," "an individual turned toward Europe," "the European," and "the Greek."[324] Indeed, Schwartz goes so far as to say that Rumi "represents a generation of Sufis drawn to Western culture."[325]

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[321] Schwartz, *The Other Islam*, 90.

[322] See Schwartz, *The Other Islam*, 22, 24, 26. Schwartz supports his position by defending Orientalist theories of Christian influence such as Spanish Orientalist Miguel Asín Palacios (d. 1944) and his idea of Ibn 'Arabi's Sufism as a "Christianized Islam." See Miguel Asín Palacios, *El Islam cristianizado: estudio del "sufismo" a través de las obras de Abenarabi de Murcia* (Madrid: Editorial Plutarco, 1931).

[323] Schwartz, *The Other Islam*, 79. Regarding Ibn 'Arabi's "influence" on Rumi see p. 286n224 above.

[324] Schwartz, *The Other Islam*, 9.

[325] Ibid., 9.

At the enlightened telos of Schwartz's genealogy of reasonable Sufism are the European Bektashis of Kosovo and Albania, whom he traces spiritually back to Ibn 'Arabi.[326] "Rather than a narrow observance," Schwartz informs us that the Bektashis "boast an openhearted form of Islam […]."[327] According to Schwartz, the Bektashis "are extremely opposed to any expression of *radical* Islam," and, as such, they consume alcohol, allow women to participate as equals without veils in their rituals, and "do not perform the normal daily prayers prescribed for Muslims."[328] Thus, the "joyful libertarianism of the Bektashis" and their "march" (as opposed to "straying") away from "sober" and *Shariah-centered Sufism*" has made them "proud to call themselves the most open and forward-looking community in Islam and the closest in heart to Jews, Christians, and Buddhists."[329]

While the Bektashis are "the 'most progressive' element in world Islam," the "Mideast Arab Sunni" Muslims are the least.[330] According to Schwartz, "All of Sunni Islam is traditionally conformist" and is "dominated by clerics and 'official' theologians […]."[331] In Schwartz's discourse, such Arab-Sunni "extremism" is associated first and foremost with the heteronomous observance of Islamic law. Indeed, as opposed to the "wild and free" Bektashis, the Naqshbandi Sufi adherence to the sharia, along with their traditional involvement in politics, is what, for Schwartz, defines them as "Sufi *fundamentalists*."[332]

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[326] Schwartz, *The Other Islam*, 80.

[327] Ibid., 153.

[328] Ibid., 83-84 (emphasis mine).

[329] Ibid., 153-154, 104.

[330] Ibid., 83, 19

[331] Ibid., 19.

[332] Schwartz, *The Other Islam*, 109, 117 (emphasis mine).

The Other Islam thus represents a culmination of the discourse of reasonable Sufism and its Kantian teleological history of rational religion. In this discourse, Ibn 'Arabi is the father of a particular Sufi tradition that has completely dissociated from its Arab-Semitic roots and attendant heteronomous law. In Schwartz's "universal" discourse, like that of Kant's, recourse to such law and ritual observance is depicted as fanatical, anti-modern, oppressive, and in need of reform. Thus, as Kant asserts above in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, "freedom" of religion is only good if there is a *"universal agreement on the essential maxims of belief* […]."

While Kant understood the various denominations of Christianity as holding such universal agreement, Judaism on the other hand did not. The only recourse for Jews, in Kant's mind, was that of inner conversion to a rational and autonomous universal faith. As Mack notes, Kant "attempted to remove Christianity's Judaic foundations. He did so by endowing Christian scripture with a radically anti-Jewish meaning."[333] Indeed, Judaism for Kant was a religion of slavery to external authority and thus represented a typology of the "heteronomous." As such, Mack importantly notes:

> By means of the construction of a group that chose to be heteronomous, [Kant] accounted for the fact that, although the ability to transcend the empirically intuited world resides in every human being, *it needs to be socially enforced*. It depends on social normativity and, as a result, *autonomy presupposes a civil society that metaphysically prescribes freedom from materialistic inclinations.*[334]

Indeed, it is precisely this Kantian notion—that modern civil society *necessitates a metaphysics of autonomy*—that fuels the consistent project of internal conversion and reform found within all of the discourses surveyed above, but most notably within those post-World

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[333] Mack, *German Idealism*, 36.

[334] Ibid., 40.

War II where Semitic Islam has replaced Judaism, while Judaism has merged with Christianity and transmogrified into the regnant Kantian "religious" model of "Judeo-Christian" civilization.

The discourse of reasonable Sufism explored in this chapter is thus based upon a specific genealogy of European metaphysics—what Pacini has identified as the modern religion of conscience, which places the onus of moral legislation upon the autonomous subject. Kant's *Religion* self-consciously aims to define modern authentic religious subjectivity through the universalization of epistemological presuppositions formed within a teleological metanarrative. While Kant's claims to civilizational universality are made for the ultimate betterment of the world and its eventual enlightenment in sociopolitical *and* religious terms, his conception of universal human subjectivity, as Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze notes, "*colonizes humanity by grounding the particularity of the European self as center* […]."[335] Such centering of humanity within a Western universal mold is what Beck calls a hegemonic "universalism of sameness"—i.e., the assertion of a common humanity at the expense of ethnic difference.[336]

This chapter has thus sought to throw into relief how the idea of universal "reason" has been mobilized within the discourse of reasonable Sufism to efface an *irrational* Muslim Other. As has been shown above, Ibn 'Arabi's gradual emergence as reasonable Sufism's progenitor and exemplar not only happens through a process of de-Semitization, but the discourse that he comes to represent is in itself a conversion narrative that seeks to de-Semitize Islam through the eradication of heteronomy—and thus history, culture, race, and

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[335] Eze, "The Color of Reason," 131 (emphasis mine).

[336] Beck, "The Truth of Others," 432-33.

tradition. Like Deleuze and Guattari's notion of European racism as the effacement of difference through the projection of the Western self-image, i.e., the "White-Man face," the discourse of reasonable Sufism projects the Kantian notion of self-rule upon the Sufi while ironically demanding the submission of the "slavish" Muslim to freedom.[337] If for Kant, "*the euthanasia of Judaism is pure moral religion*," then here *the euthanasia of Semitic Islam* is reasonable Sufism.

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[337] As Rousseau stated, "whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the whole body; *which means nothing else than that he shall be forced to be free* […]." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses,* trans. and ed. Susan Dunn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 27 (emphasis mine).

CONCLUSION

MAKING IBN ʿARABI FROM ZERO DEGREES:
THE QUESTION OF AUTONOMY AND THE WESTERN IDEA OF UNIVERSALISM

[I]t is power, and not inherent qualities of openness or rigidity, moral relativism or orthodoxy, that produces the universal and the particular, the tolerant and the tolerated, the West and the East, the pluralist and the fundamentalist, the civilized and the barbaric, the same and the other.[1]

Lazarus Bendavid, the "intelligent Jew" mentioned by Kant in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, as discussed in the last chapter of this study, began his 1793 anthropological work *Notes Regarding the Characteristics of the Jews* (Etwas zur Charakteristik der Juden) with the question: "What must the Jews do to make themselves fit for a civil reform?"[2] Indeed, Kant praised Bendavid precisely because he was willing not only to accept the validity of Christianity, but to abandon the heteronomous law and practices of Judaism for what Bendavid called "the pure teaching of Moses," i.e., the Kantian pure rational religion.[3] While Kant afforded the Jews their right to remain outwardly as Jews, his teleological metanarrative of rational religion envisioned the eventual casting off of all "statutes and observances," which were once necessary for humanity in its infancy but now had become "a fetter."[4] Thus

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[1] Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 187.

[2] Cited in Paul Lawrence Rose, *Revolutionary Antisemitism in Germany from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton: New Jersey, 1990), 95. See Lazarus Bendavid, *Etwas zur Charakteristik der Juden* (Leipzig, 1793).

[3] Susan Meld Shell, *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 324.

[4] Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009), 135.

in his praise of Bendavid's progress towards such ends Kant would state in visionary fashion: "The euthanasia of Judaism is pure moral religion, *freed from all the ancient statutory teachings* […]."[5]

It is indeed through Kant's theoretical intervention that the idea of "autonomy" emerges from its almost exclusive denotation of political independence into the additional realm of subjective freedom.[6] According to Wendy Brown, Kant's definitive theory of modern autonomy "presupposes independence from others, independence from authority in general, *and* the independence of reason itself."[7] Conversely, those mired in heteronomy are like slaves who have no independent power, reason, or morality. As Brown notes, the modern liberal devotion to autonomy along Kantian lines disparages the heteronomous traditional subject as uncontrollably saturated with culture and religion—or "culture *as* religion, and religion *as* culture"—while culture and religion are for the autonomous liberal subject extrinsic rather than constitutive.[8]

Yet, the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas has skeptically asked if it is possible to separate "'moral consciousness' […] from a certain heteronomy, from a relation with the Other, with exteriority?"[9] This question points to a similar problematic that binds the preceding chapters. In the first half of this study, I have argued that although much of the Western interpretive tradition surrounding Ibn 'Arabi has tried to separate his "mystical

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[5] Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties: Der Streit der Fakultäten*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 95 (emphasis mine).

[6] Shell, *Kant*, 2.

[7] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 152.

[8] Ibid., 153

[9] Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-Of-The-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 22.

consciousness" from traditional heteronomous authority, such a dissociation is not possible. Indeed, Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysical supersessionism, which is grounded within classical Islamic legal and theological doctrine, is in many ways an example of the Levinasian challenge to the Nietzschean—and thus Kantian—categorization of heteronomy as self-enslavement.[10] Levinas argues that when the religious subject accepts a divine command, rather than subordination, the subject engages a "consciousness of responsibility" that not only signifies the status of receiving a command, but that of *empowerment*. Here, Levinas uses the dual sense of the French "*ordonné*" (ordained/ordered) as an example: "when you become a priest, you are ordained, you take orders; but in reality you receive powers. The word '*ordonné*' in French means both having received orders and having been consecrated."[11]

It is in this sense of "consecration" *qua* empowerment that we can understand Ibn 'Arabi's engagement with the heteronomous tradition of Islam. As noted at the start of chapter 1, Ibn 'Arabi holds that the implementation of the sharia unveils "divine knowledge" that is concealed within it.[12] Thus, according to Ibn 'Arabi, it is precisely through such obedience that the Muslim subject becomes "consecrated" in the Levinasian sense. Indeed, Levinas himself notes that *heteronomy is somehow stronger than autonomy*,"[13] and it is

[10] E.g., Nietzsche states: "Every sort of faith is in itself an evidence of self-effacement, of self-estrangement. . . . When one reflects how necessary it is to the great majority that there be regulations to restrain them from without and hold them fast, and to what extent control, or, in a higher sense, slavery, is the one and only condition which makes for the well-being of the weak-willed man, and especially woman, then one at once understands conviction and 'faith.'" F. W. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. H. L. Mencken (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920), 154.

[11] Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 22.

[12] Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2004), 184 (Fut. II, 533).

[13] Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 111 (emphasis mine).

again in a strikingly similar way that Ibn ʿArabi states that the "outwardly manifest (*al-ẓāhir*) is stronger than the inwardly hidden (*al-bāṭin*)" because of the outward's "greater comprehensiveness" and the more extensive nature of the divine-human relationship over that of the divine alone.[14] Here, as in Levinas's example of "ordination," *power* is a concealed and paradoxical element within *subordination*—i.e., the nature of accepting responsibility *necessitates* a bestowal of power.

Thus, as fleshed out in chapter 1, Ibn ʿArabi's heteronomous subjectivity as the "Seal of the Saints" (*khātam al-awliyāʾ*)—i.e., the supreme "spiritual" manifestation of the *logoic* Muhammadan Reality—entails both his claim of responsibility as protector of the sharia and claim to the supreme spiritual power of prophetic comprehensiveness. Rather than interpreting Qur'an 3:84 (which calls for faith in all previous revelations without distinction between them) as an appeal for religious pluralism, Ibn ʿArabi claims the verse "key to all knowledge" and an indication of his triumphal attainment of the Muhammadan station as *the logoic totality* of prophetic consciousness.[15] It is indeed through such a heteronomous framework that Ibn ʿArabi comprehends himself to be "consecrated" in a strikingly similar way to the Levinasian notion above—as he plainly asserts: "I *am* holy."[16] It is just such a *logoic* identification with revelation that leads Levinas to rhetorically ask elsewhere, "Is the human word not the very modality of the manifestation and resonance of the Word?"[17]

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[14] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 4, 184 (Fut. II, 533). See chapter 1, p. 37.

[15] Ibid., vol. 6, 65 (Fut. III, 350). See chapter 1, p. 57

[16] Ibn ʿArabī, *Tanazzul al-amlāk min ʿālam al-arwāḥ ilā ʿālam al-aflāk* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1961), 61. See chapter 1, p. 56.

[17] Emmanuel Levinas quoted in Michael Fagenblat and Nathan Wolski, "Revelation Here and Beyond: Buber and Levinas on the Bible," in *Levinas & Buber: Dialogue & Difference*, ed. Peter Atterton, Matthew Calarco, and Maurice Friedman (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 175.

And yet, the problem with such heteronomous identification is precisely the exclusivism involved in such "manifestation and resonance" with the external command. For such resonance exhibits an immediacy that Levinas describes as "[a]n obedience preceding the hearing of the order […]."[18] Such obedience, according to Levinas, is marked by an "extreme urgency […] by which, 'to the exclusion of everything else,' the imperative is categorical and subservience irreversible […]."[19] It is just this exclusivity that the Perennialist portrayal of Ibn ʿArabi as a religious pluralist attempts to neutralize.

As was shown in the first part of this study, Ibn ʿArabi is anachronistically portrayed as holding to the Schuonian Perennialist construction of "universal validity" that acknowledges all contemporaneous "orthodox" religions as equally valid paths to the divine. A key element in such a portrayal is the denial of Ibn ʿArabi's adherence to the classical doctrine of abrogation (*naskh*) and the textual corruption (*taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*) of pre-Qurʾanic revelations. As was argued in chapter 2, the Schuonian Copernican turn towards multiple religious solar systems—each having a prophetic sun that while absolute for its particular religion is relative in comparison to all the other solar systems—is an obviously modern construction. While the preeminent Ibn ʿArabi scholar William Chittick has claimed this to have been Ibn ʿArabi's own position, I have shown that this claim cannot be discursively sustained.

Although Schuon and those who follow him assert that such a "Copernican" perspective respects the absolutism of each religion, such claims rest upon the acceptance that each system's religious laws are not absolute. Yet, as the first part of this study attests,

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[18] Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 151.

[19] Ibid.

321

Ibn 'Arabi's entire metaphysical cosmology and cosmography are built upon the notion that the religious laws of Islam are abrogative and thus absolute. While the People of the Book are allowed to remain upon their own religious laws, they do so only through submitting to the Qur'anic command of 9:29, which demands their humiliation and subjugation through the payment of the poll-tax (*jizya*). Even though Ibn 'Arabi concedes to the possibility of their redemptive felicity (*saʿāda*), the People of the Book are granted this only through their obedience to the Muhammadan sharia and not through the contemporaneous validity of their own revealed scriptures, which—*pace* Chittick and Reza Shah-Kazemi—Ibn 'Arabi held to have been textually corrupted.

While Perennialist portrayals of Ibn 'Arabi's adherence to the sharia are convincingly categorized as "traditional," the notion of a classical Islamic "heteronomous" tradition that acknowledges multiple heteronomies *denies the very basis* of premodern heteronomy—i.e., its absolutism. Thus, the Perennialist portrayal of Ibn 'Arabi as universally accepting all contemporaneous religious laws as equally valid transmogrifies heteronomy into proto-autonomy. In other words, if each revealed legal tradition from every religion is equally absolute, as the Perennialists claim, then all exclusivist doctrines are effectively relativized. While such relativization is mobilized in the name of universalism and the "validity" of all religious laws, it nevertheless discursively excludes the exclusory discourse it claims to embrace. As Hugh Nicholson observes, "The effort to dissociate religion from exclusionary, 'us' versus 'them' relations ends up merely transposing the act of exclusion to a meta-level where the excluded 'other'—in the form of exclusivist theologies—is not immediately recognized."[20]

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[20] Hugh Nicholson, *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8.

For example, in his recent universalist work on the Qur'an and interfaith dialogue, which overtly incorporates a Perennialist interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi, Shah-Kazemi confidently claims that his brand of Schuonian universalism "upholds as irreducible the differences of outward religious forms, for these differences are seen as divinely sanctioned: they are diverse forms reflecting the principle of divine infinity, *not just accidental expressions of human diversity*."[21] Yet when he attempts to situate Ibn 'Arabi's thought within such universalism, Shah-Kazemi qualifies his above assertion:

> The oneness of the message […] implies a diversity of formal expressions, these expressions not being reducible to each other on the formal plane, *even if they are considered, in their formal aspect, as 'accidental' in relation to the 'necessary' import of the supra-formal substance.*[22]

Shah-Kazemi thus contradicts himself by admitting that the different religious forms are indeed "accidental" compared to the "supra-formal" essence of religion itself, i.e., the *religio perennis*. It is through such a drift in categorization between religious form as non-accidental to accidental that Shah-Kazemi can thus state in the same work with no apparent irony:

> *No one interpretation can therefore be put forward as right and true to the exclusion of all others.* One must repeat: to exclude the exclusivist reading is in turn to fall into a mode of exclusivism. Thus, a truly inclusivist metaphysical perspective must recognize the validity of the exclusivist, theological perspective, *even if it must also—on pain of disingenuousness— uphold as more compelling, more convincing, and even more 'true', the universalist understanding of Islam.*[23]

Here, Shah-Kazemi claims the universal validity of all religious subjectivities. He then emphatically asserts that such a claim *must* include exclusivism—yet he does so only to again contradict himself in the very next sentence. While Shah-Kazemi claims that no particular interpretation can be said to be "*right and true to the exclusion of all others*," at the

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[21] Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Qur'ān and Interfaith Dialogue* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2006), xxv (emphasis mine).

[22] Ibid., 162 (emphasis mine).

[23] Ibid., 157 (emphasis mine).

end of the day it must be admitted that the universalist position is "*more compelling, more convincing, and even more 'true'*" than the exclusivist one. Thus, even Shah-Kazemi's careful attempt to embrace the exclusivist in order to avoid falling "into a mode of exclusivism" fails. Such failure lies precisely in the need to reiterate difference and enunciate superiority. As Wouter Hanegraaff observes, this type of a perennialist position views exclusivist theologies as representing "'lower' levels in a hierarchy, or stages in a process of evolution towards genuine spiritual insight, which means that they are imperfect."[24] **"**[I]t is difficult to see," Hanegraaff thus trenchantly notes, "how this should be distinguished from other forms of exclusivism or, in some cases, dogmatism."[25] Indeed, Slavoj Žižek has called such positionality "the privileged *empty point of universality*" through which the acknowledgement of "the Other's specificity is the very form of asserting one's own superiority."[26] Thus in all universalist discourse, the apparent absoluteness of religious forms *must be* accidental and thus *less true* than the universal essence that unites them, otherwise "universalism" ceases to have meaning as a truth claim.

While Perennialism is based upon a discourse of decline from an ancient golden age and hope of a palingenetic renewal, the Kantian vision of "pure rational religion" that forms what I call reasonable Sufism in chapter 4 is a progressive teleology. Yet, both modes of universalism acknowledge a transcendent religious *a priori* that relativizes historical religious form. Thus, the histories, cultures, and ethnicities connected to them are also relativized. The truth is universal, i.e., the transcendent *a priori* (religion *as such*, pure

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[24] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion* and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 329.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Slavoj Žižek, "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism," *New Left Review* 225 (1997): 44 (emphasis original).

esotericism, pure metaphysics, pure reason, etc.), while outward religious forms only serve as symbols or palimpsests for universal meaning—i.e., "mythologies" in Frithjof Schuon and "inventions" in Kant.[27] Like the Kantian position, Perennialism holds that authentic religious subjectivity is independent from religious form *and is not constituted by it*. Since "the truth" has nothing to do with the externals—i.e., the external religious forms are not spiritually determinative—they are *accidental, secondary, and less true*. As Kant states, the different religions and revelations are "*nothing more than the accidental vehicles of religion* and can only thereby be different in different times and places."[28]

The idea that there exists a "universal beyond time and space" has been a seminal conceit in European imperialism since the end of the fifteenth century.[29] The modern European attempt to find an objective, "universal" perspective "independent of its ethnic and cultural center of observation" has been dubbed by Santiago Castro-Gómez "*the hubris of zero degrees*."[30] Building on the work of Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo, Castro-Gómez observes that the European hubris of zero degrees emerged as the result of the Spanish conquest of America and the imperial need for cartographic precision. Like the Copernican

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[27] See Frithjof Schuon, *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, ed. James S. Cutsinger, trans. Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge, and James Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 20, 63; and Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009), 123

[28] Immanuel Kant, *To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 24 (emphasis mine).

[29] Ramón Grosfoguel and Eric Mielants, "The Long-Durée Entanglement Between Islamophobia and Racism in the Modern/Colonial Capitalist/Patriarchal World-System: An Introduction," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 5, no. 1 (2006): 8. As Grosfoguel and Mielants note, 1492 was formative for modern categories of knowledge in that it marks both the fall of Granada and the Spanish re-conquest of Andalusia and the expulsion of Jews and Arabs from Iberia and the simultaneous "discovery" of the Americas and the colonization of its indigenous peoples. Through these events, "Jews and Arabs became the subaltern intern 'Others' within Europe, while indigenous people became the external 'Others' of Europe" (ibid., 2).

[30] Santiago Castro-Gómez, "(Post)Coloniality for Dummies: Latin American Perspectives on Modernity, Coloniality, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáurequi (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 278.

turn, European cartographers transcended the medieval depiction of an ethnocentric realm contained within a circular limit. Through the use of the new mathematics of perspective, such innovative cartography transposed itself from its ethnic location to an Archimedean meta-position—"a sovereign gaze external to the representation."[31]

While Kant's universalism is famously marked by his self-acknowledged Copernican turn away from the multiplicity of heteronomous empiricism to a transcendent *a priori* of autonomous reason,[32] Schuon's universalism is similarly inscribed by a self-conscious Copernican turn away from a premodern hierarchical religiocentrism to a heliocentric model of religious unity made possible through a transcendent religious *a priori*.[33] While it can thus be argued that both Kantian and Schuonian universalist cosmologies reflect a similar "Copernican" perspective, following Castro-Gómez I argue that they also—and in terms of discursive function, *more directly*—reflect the *imperial subjectivity* of the Copernican age itself and the hegemonic universalism it produced. As Castro-Gómez notes, the shift in perspective of European universalism, and its attendant hubris of zero degrees, is not a product of the Copernican revolution, but rather it is the product of the imperial designs of the nascent Spanish empire.[34] While claiming scientific "objectivity," European cartographers pictorially and discursively colonized geo-political space through normalizing

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[31] Ibid., 278.

[32] As discussed in chapter 4; see p. 252 and 252n62.

[33] As discussed in chapter 2; see p. 122. As Schuon notes: "It has become impossible to provide an effective defense for a single religion against all the others […]; to persist in doing so […] is a little like wishing to maintain the Ptolemaic system against the evidence of verified and verifiable astronomical data." Frithjof Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence: A New Translation with Selected Letters*, trans. Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge, and James S. Cutsinger, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009), 4.

[34] Castro-Gómez, "(Post)Coloniality for Dummies," 279.

326

hierarchies of civilizational and religious difference in Euro- and Christocentric terms.[35] Like the Žižekian notion of the "empty point of universality" above, the hubris of zero degrees concealed its own situated position of enunciation and exported local European history as universal truth. Thus universalized, such world-ordering "would become the epistemological base that gave rise to the anthropological, social, and evolutionist theories of the Enlightenment."[36]

The dawn of the Copernican age and sixteenth century imperialism also marks the beginning of a shift from premodern religious exclusivity and the inferiorization of different religions to modern racism and the inferiorization of the human beings who practice them.[37] Like the cartographical point of zero degrees, race arises "as one of the central conceptual inventions of modernity."[38] Indeed, European imperialism and the "objective" hierarchical world-ordering it produces is coterminous with the rise of racial difference between conquered and conqueror.[39]

Yet, while sixteenth century European imperialism was crucially important in the conceptualization of racial difference, it was the paradigm shift of Cartesian mind-body dualism in the seventeenth century that reduced social subjectivities "to physical dimensions and correlates."[40] Indeed as James Byrne notes, the privilege that Cartesian mind-body dualism gives to the rational over the physical "reinforced the trend in Western thought – a

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Grosfoguel and Mielants, "The Long-Durée," 4.

[38] David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 3.

[39] Ibid., 53.

[40] Ibid.

trend which had roots in a particular Christian anthropology – *to view the body as the locus of error, weakness and sin*."[41] Along with the conceit of European universalism, Cartesian mind-body dualism and *the primacy of reason over physicality* proved to be a major influence on Kant.[42] Kant thus understood rational autonomy, i.e. the "pure *a priori*," as freedom from all empirical and subjective sources of reality. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant calls such subjective sources "practical concepts," which include "objects of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, i.e., of pleasure or displeasure, and thus, at least indirectly, to objects of our feeling."[43]

Through such a prism of Cartesian dualism, Kantian autonomy thus contends that there is a universal truth shared by all humanity that is unconstituted by external forces, that it is hermetically sealed from its environment, from history, religious tradition, laws, and practice. In such a Cartesian view, consciousness itself *is disembodied and dissociated from the outward world*. As Michael Mack notes, "Kant in fact established an idealist anthropology in which human achievements always involve the overcoming of a dependence on the material world."[44] Recourse to the material world in opposition to such idealism was thus racialized by Kant, who "saw in the Jews the opposite of reason's purity: they embodied the impurity of empirical reality, of 'matter.'"[45]

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[41] James M. Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 67.

[42] See Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment*, 67, 207.

[43] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 675.

[44] Michael Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 104.

[45] Ibid., 3.

Such Kantian typologies of autonomy and heteronomy would indeed play a seminal role in nineteenth century German anti-Semitism.[46] Indeed, Houston Stewart Chamberlain (d. 1927)—the notorious "seer of the Third Reich"[47] whose discourse was compared with Schuon's in chapter 3—was heavily influenced by Kantian idealist anthropology.[48] Chamberlain thus echoes Kant's racialized idealism when he claims, "Wherever the Semitic spirit has breathed we shall meet with […] materialism."[49] Thus, Chamberlain would state in characteristic Kantian terms: in the Semitic "view of religion *only practical ends are pursued, no ideal ones*."[50] The "practical ends" to which Chamberlain here refers are none other than what Kant calls "practical concepts," which as mentioned above denote empirically experienced and observed elements of consciousness.

Indeed, such a Kantian-based typology of Semitic heteronomy is also strikingly echoed in Schuon, who in chapter 3 was shown to consistently portray Aryans as "objectivists" and Semites as "subjectivists." Here, Schuon's use of the term "subjectivist" (*subjectiviste*)[51] refers to an ontological state that lacks intellectual objectivity and is instead subsumed by personal experience and feeling.[52] In Schuon's deployment, Aryan objectivity

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[46] Primarily through his philosophical successor Johann Gottlieb Fichte (d. 1814). See Paul Lawrence Rose, *Revolutionary Antisemitism in Germany from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton: New Jersey, 1990), 117-132.

[47] Roderick Stackelberg, "Chamberlain, Houston Stewart (1855–1927)," in *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, ed. Richard S. Levy (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 113. See chapter 3, p. 181n82.

[48] Mack, *German Idealism*, 104.

[49] Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Lees, vol. 1 (New York: Howard Fertig, 1968), 422 (emphasis mine).

[50] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

[51] E.g., Frithjof Schuon, *Le Soufisme: voile et quintessence* (Paris : Dervy-Livres, 1980), 38.

[52] As was noted in chapter 3, the German Indologist Christian Lassen (1876) similarly held that the Semitic nature was too "subjective" since it was dominated by empirical senses and emotions. Not only did such

"*is none other than the truth*,"[53] while Semitic subjectivity is marked by what is accidental and thus "*enclosed in a dogma*."[54] Here "objectivity," like Kantian "pure" reason, is a transcendent intellectual mode that is distinct from empirical, material, and "subjective" deceptions such as the passions and emotions.

While Schuon claims that Semitic intelligence "takes on the color of obedience,"[55] "Aryan thought" perceives the universal "nature of things" itself.[56] Schuon thus posits Aryan "objectivity" as the transcendent opposite of Semitic heteronomy and its recourse to jurisprudence and ritual practice—what Schuon refers to as the Semitic "*need for external activities*."[57] Like Kant and Chamberlain above, Schuon also associates "the material" with the typology of the Semitic as evinced in his description of the "Semitic" attachment of Muhammad "to human things" in contradistinction to Jesus's "Aryan" tendency "*toward the idealistic simplification of earthly contingencies*."[58]

Although the metaphysical perspectives of Schuonian Perennialism and Kantianism are situated at polar ends of a continuum regarding the human potential for knowledge of the

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subjectivity, according to Lassen, result in the Semitic incapacity for higher objective thought, it also was the cause of Semitic egoism and religious exclusivity. See chapter 3, p. 178.

[53] Schuon, *Echoes of Perennial Wisdom*, trans. Mark Perry and Jean-Pierre Lafouge (Bloomington: World Wisdom), 60 (emphasis mine).

[54] Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, 128 (emphasis mine). See chapter 3, pp. 206-207.

[55] Schuon, *Sufism*, 21.

[56] Frithjof Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976), 146.

[57] Frithjof Schuon, *Castes and Races*, trans. Marco Pallis and Macleod Matheson (Bedfont: Perennial Books Ltd., 1982), 24.

[58] Frithjof Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions*, trans. Mark Perry and Jean-Pierre LaFouge (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002), 24 (emphasis mine). See chapter 3, p. 194.

divine,[59] they not only share philosophical and religious antecedents,[60] they *functionally* converge in their insistence on the primacy of individual autonomy for "pure" religious subjectivity over all forms of traditional heteronomy. It is this functional equivalence that links their discursive practices to a common European intellectual genealogy through recourse to Eurocentric and racialized discursive formations denigrating Semitic heteronomy in opposition to Indo- and Greco-European autonomous superiority.

As was discussed in chapter 4, Kant's teleology of autonomous religiosity envisions "religion finally to be detached gradually from all empirical determining bases*, from all statutes that rest on history* […]."[61] Brown describes the contemporary secular-liberal equivalent of such constructions as "*the autonomy of the subject from culture*—the idea that the subject is prior to culture and free to choose culture […]."[62] It is indeed through such a conceit of autonomy that post-Kantian Western thought has tended to remove itself from the map of history and universalize Western epistemology as truth. Denuded of all trace of historical particularity, autonomy thus becomes a modern marker of religious, ethnoracial,

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[59] While Schuonian Perennialism discursively appropriates various modes of intellectual mysticism found in Stoicism, Platonism, and Neoplatonism (including their Christian and Islamic variations) in which unitive knowledge of the divine, Intellect, *Logos*, etc. is attainable through inward "gnosis," Kantian rationalism decidedly rejects any notion that knowledge of the "noumenal" realm (i.e., the divine) is attainable. Yet, Kantian metaphysics draws on the same sources as Schuon (see following note).

[60] As discussed in chapter 4, Kantian metaphysics draws heavily upon the intellectual mysticism of the Christian Platonic/Neoplatonic tradition that Schuonian Perennialism is based upon. Moreover, the German Pietist tradition not only heavily informed Kant's understanding of religion, but served as an important basis of German Romanticism, which as noted in chapters 2 and 3 influenced Schuon. Pietism stressed a radical inward spirituality that de-emphasized the place of ritual within Protestantism, which was already notable for its marginalization of ritualism from Catholicism. Regarding Kant's response to Pietism see Stephen Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 140. Regarding the debt that German Romanticism has to Pietism see Richard Littlejohns, "Early Romanticism," in *The Literature of German Romanticism*, ed. Dennis F. Mahone (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), 63. Regarding Pietistic de-emphasis of ritual, see F. Ernest Stoeffler, "Pietism," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., vol. 10 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 7143. See also chapter 4, pp. 259-60.

[61] Kant, *Religion*, 135 (emphasis mine).

[62] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 167.

and civilizational superiority, while heteronomy represents those inferior Others still epistemologically burdened by their own socio-historical baggage, i.e., their ethnoracial selves. In such racialized discourse, the sixteenth century sanctification of European subjectivity as an invisible "sovereign gaze"—or what Castro-Gómez also refers to as "the power of a *Deus absconditus*"—emerges as universalized truth.[63]

Ashwani Sharma has called this Eurocentric paradigm "whiteness as 'absent presence'," which "seeks to stand for and be a measure of all humanity. *It operates as a universal point of identification that strives to structure all social identities*."[64] Indeed, Kant himself asserts that "Humanity exists in its greatest perfection in the white race."[65] Moreover, as discussed in chapter 4, Kant's teleological metanarrative posits the emergence of "pure rational religion ultimately to rule over all," but only if humanity divests itself of its doctrinal "cloaks" of theology and its accompanying legal and ritual practice.[66] Schuon too holds a similar position of "whiteness as 'absent presence'." While he claims, as noted in chapter 3, that the "*pre-eminence*" of "the white race" is marked by its superior "*contemplativity*," Schuon also asserts that the goal of his esotericism is to shed the outward forms of religion (*religio formalis*) and attain to the pure internal religion (*religio perennis*).[67] Thus, in both

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[63] "[T]he power of a *Deus absconditus*," according to Castro-Gómez, "can see without being seen and can observe the world without having to prove to anybody […] the legitimacy of that observation." Castro-Gómez, "(Post)Coloniality for Dummies," 282.

[64] Ashwani Sharma, "Postcolonial Racism: White Paranoia and the Terrors of Multiculturalism," in *Racism Postcolonialism Europe*, ed. Graham Huggan and Ian Law (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 123 (emphasis mine).

[65] Kant quoted in Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 118.

[66] Kant, *Religion*, 135 See chapter 4, pp. 260-61, and similarly 266-67.

[67] See chapter 3, pp. 164-65; 212, 214.

Kant and Schuon, such calls to cast off external form are tied to the assumed superiority of an imagined "white" European autonomous subjectivity over and against the slavish heteronomy of Semitic religious subjectivity.

Such clear discourse conflating autonomy with racial superiority is thus a stark and ironic indication that Kantian and Schuonian so-called modes of "pure" universalism and "objectivity" are in fact quite the opposite—i.e., historically situated European presuppositions regarding what counts as authentically religious. Moreover, such situatedness calls into question the entire conceit that these modes of thinking are "autonomous" in the first place. If universalist claims to autonomy are built upon premises that follow discursive "rules" established within longstanding genealogies of discrimination, then how truly autonomous are they? Thus, Levinas's question quoted above comes to the fore: can "moral consciousness" be separated from "heteronomy, from a relation with the Other, with exteriority?" If, as Brown asserts, "the pure principle of pluralism […] rests on autonomy,"[68] and autonomy is shown to rest upon exclusivist premises, where does that leave universalist claims to religious pluralism?

While Ibn 'Arabi enunciated the absolute supersession of Islam over all other religions, both Schuon and Kant posit an interior religious essence or disposition found within the primordial consciousness of all humanity and thus free from religious exclusivism and prejudice.[69] Yet, as was shown in chapter 3, Schuon understood that his idea of esoterism, i.e., the *religio perennis*, was out of all religions the only path that "*is absolutely*

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[68] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 201.

[69] As noted in chapter 4, Kant recognized a "moral predisposition" of the human being where "the will of God is originally inscribed in our hearts." Kant, *Religion*, 114. See chapter 4, p. 261, 261n105.

monotheistic, it alone recognizing only one religion under diverse forms."[70] As such, Schuon replaced the Muhammadan *Logos* with the Virgin Mary, who as the *logoic* representative of the *religio perennis* holds "celestial supremacy" and "spiritual and cosmic supereminence."[71] Similarly, as mentioned above, the Kantian religious metanarrative envisions a final telos of "pure rational religion" that will ultimately render all other historical religions void and thus "*rule over all.*" As Paul Rose notes, Kant's call for the "euthanasia of Judaism" (as quoted above and discussed in chapter 4) through an inner conversion to "pure moral religion" was "in effect nothing more than a secularization of the old Christian idea that the Old Testament and the Jewish religion had been superseded by the New Testament and Christianity."[72]

Thus, in ironically similar ways to the absolute religious discourse of Ibn 'Arabi, Kant and Schuon offer their own versions of supersessionism. Yet unlike Ibn 'Arabi, their discourse is additionally racialist in particularly modern terms. Where Ibn 'Arabi is open about his exclusivism, Kant and Schuon conceal their exclusivism within discourses that claim the exact opposite. In the face of such schemas that obscure and thus normalize their exclusivist presuppositions, Kantian and Schuonian universal assertions can only be construed as ideological.[73] The radical incongruity inherent within these discourses also calls into question the entire premise of religious universalism and the possibility of non-exclusivist religious identity. Such paradoxical inconsistencies are indeed an indication that exclusivism is inherent within the construction of any claim to truth. Thus, in observing such

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[70] Schuon, *Sufism*, 41 (emphasis mine).

[71] Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, 101.

[72] Paul Lawrence Rose, *Revolutionary Antisemitism in Germany from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton: New Jersey, 1990), 96.

[73] I.e., as a concealed means to control or dominate a discursive domain. See Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), 5, 11.

contradictions in other related examples of universalist theology, Nicholson observes that "[t]he entirety of religious discourse and practice […] *would appear to be implicated, either directly or indirectly, in relations of religious rivalry*."[74]

As I have argued throughout this study, religious knowledge is constituted by its discursive context—it is produced through historical contestations and is thus *perspectival*. As Michel Foucault thus asserts, "One can speak of the perspectival character of knowledge because there is a battle and knowledge is the effect of this battle."[75] Just as Castro-Gómez argues that the universal taxonomical categories that emerged in the sixteenth century were the products of local European epistemology in the service of imperial designs, Kant's own discourse of universalism "pertains not," as Ian Hunter puts it, "to universal truth, but to a particular regional way of acceding to truth as 'universal.'"[76] As with universal truth, so then with the presupposition of autonomous thought itself. Indeed, as the cultural theorist Raymond Williams noted regarding the figure of the individual author/subject: "No man is the author of himself […]."[77] Thus, according to Williams, "not only the forms but the contents of consciousness are socially produced."[78]

Yet, universalist discourses that claim access to a transcendent religious essence, and thus disavow religious difference, do so not only through the modern conceit of *autonomy*,

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[74] Nicholson, *Comparative Theology*, 10 (emphasis mine).

[75] Michel Foucault quoted in Arnold I. Davidson introduction to *Society Must be Defended: lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76,* by Michel Foucault, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York : Picador, 2003), xxi.

[76] Ian Hunter, "Kant's Regional Cosmopolitanism," *Journal of the History of International Law* 12, no. 2 (2010): 183.

[77] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 193.

[78] Ibid.

but also through its twin contemporary concept of *equality*. As David Theo Goldberg notes,

the "shift of discourse from the insistence upon religious principle to the modernist value of

individual equality" is first indicated in the sixteenth century Spanish Dominican missionary

Bartolomé de Las Casas (d. 1566).[79] Las Casas eloquently defended the humanity of the

Amerindians and argued that all people whatever color or culture were ruled by the universal

laws of nature and humanity. Yet, Las Casas's notion of equality, as Goldberg points out,

was "*ultimately the equality of each to become Christian.*"[80] Indeed, according to Las Casas,

the resistance of Muslims to convert to Christianity justified their condemnation "as the

veritable barbarian outcasts of all nations."[81] Like his contemporary Spanish cartographers,

Las Casas's universalism was based upon a hegemonic perspective of "humanity" that

reflected his European superiority—those that would not accede to it were simply beyond the

pale of civilization. As Talal Asad trenchantly notes, "It is often said that the Renaissance

'discovered man,' but that discovery was in effect a psychological reconstruction of

European individuality."[82]

    As discussed in chapter 4, an excellent example of such hegemonic universalism is

articulated by Jeffrey Kripal who employs Ibn 'Arabi as representative of the "*mystical*

denial of difference."[83] While such an assertion ostensibly claims equality as its concern, it is

deployed in order to make the Muslim subject fit strictures of Western "universal"

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[79] Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 25.

[80] Ibid., 26 (emphasis mine).

[81] Las Casas quoted in Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 26.

[82] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 20.

[83] Jeffrey J. Kripal, *The Serpent's Gift: Gnostic Reflections on the Study of Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 116 (emphasis mine).

presuppositions and thus take so-called Islam to task for its failure "to answer or fully participate" in "the rise of modernity and the Enlightenment."[84] Such discourse emerges as an imposition of a particular European discursive formation in combination with a simultaneous disavowal of the effects of Western domination and colonialism—i.e., a disavowal of socio-political, historical, and cultural difference.[85] Thus, Kripal's so-called "mystical denial of difference" ironically achieves its goal through an imposition of Western civilizational superiority—what I refer to in chapter 4 as a coercive discourse of "saming." Yet, as Goldberg perspicaciously observes, such a hegemonic and paradoxical deployment of "difference" is intrinsic to the so-called universalism of liberal modernity:

> The more abstract modernity's universal identity, the more it has to be insisted upon, the more it needs to be *imposed*. The more ideologically hegemonic liberal values seem and the more open to difference liberal modernity declares itself, the more dismissive of difference it becomes and the more closed it seeks to make the circle of acceptability.[86]

As mentioned in the introduction to this study and further discussed in chapter 4, the discursive imposition of such modern universal identity was readily apparent in the eighteenth and nineteenth century European debates over Jewish emancipation. In order to be compatible with "the new universal state," as Brown notes, "Jewishness could no longer consist in belonging to a distinct community bound by religious law, ritualized practices, and generational continuity; rather, it would consist at most in privately held and conducted belief."[87] If the second half of this study has shown one overarching relationship between modern universalist discourses on Sufism and Ibn 'Arabi, it is recourse to the Semitic as

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[84] Ibid.

[85] See chapter 4, p. 311.

[86] Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 6-7.

[87] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 52.

representative of heteronomy. The distinctive difference between Kant's discourse opposing

heteronomy and the anti-heteronomous discourse explored throughout this study is the

modern Western shift from Judaism to Islam as emblematic of the heteronomous Other.[88]

Today, Islam has replaced the typology refined within nineteenth century European

discourse regarding the Jewish Question. As evinced in Bernard Lewis's juxtaposition of

"Judeo-Christian" religious subjectivity with "standard" Islam in chapter 4, there has been a

shift in European acceptance of Judaism after the end of the second World War and its

political effects.[89] The Kantian hermeneutical tradition has become part of the heritage of

"Judeo-Christian" humanism that reads the Ten Commandments according to the universal

principles of autonomous morality in opposition to a supposed irrational Islamic textual focus

on obedience to heteronomous law. In such discourse as enunciated by Lewis, the

commandments of the Decalogue are *humanized* and thus *civilized* in terms of Kantian

autonomous morality, while the heteronomy of "standard" Islam is representative of what

Brown refers to as "the putative rule by culture or religion" that threatens to thwart

"individual autonomy with religious or cultural commandments."[90]

Countering such threats of heteronomous "rule" is similarly the aim of the RAND

Corporation's program of "religion building," also discussed in chapter 4, which promotes

Sufism against Islam(*ism*) as a means to achieve the modern "*necessity* to depart from,

modify, and selectively ignore elements of […] original religious doctrine."[91] Like Kripal's

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[88] As noted in chapter 3, the Semitization of Islam paralleled the Aryanization of Christianity in nineteenth century Aryanist discourse. See chapter 3, p. 193.

[89] Not least of which was the formation of the Jewish state in 1948. See chapter 4, pp. 296-99.

[90] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 166.

[91] Cheryl Benard, *Civil and Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, Strategies* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2003), 37 (emphasis mine).

"mystical denial of difference," Sufism is thus mobilized to endorse an autonomous

religiosity that transcends religious form, culture, and history. As Asad notes:

> [t]he idea that people's historical experience is inessential to them, that it can be shed at will, makes it possible to argue more strongly for the Enlightenment's claim to universality: Muslims, as members of the abstract category "humans," can be assimilated or […] "translated" into a global ("European") civilization *once they have divested themselves of what many of them regard (mistakenly) as essential to themselves*. The belief that human beings can be separated from their histories and traditions makes it possible to urge a Europeanization of the Islamic world.[92]

Thus, the result of the Kantian imposition of universalism through the assault on heteronomy

is precisely the effacement of historical difference through the European universalization of

its own truth claims. In such discourse, as demonstrated in chapter 4, Sufism becomes simply

a reflection of the European self-image of autonomy posed against a Muslim heteronomous

Other—what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari identify as the European racism of

"facialization" through the projection of "the White-Man face."[93]

As Saba Mahmood importantly notes, it is not only Islamic militants who are the

object of current Western projects of liberal reform, "but all those Muslims who follow what

are considered to be nonliberal, orthodox, and conservative interpretations of Islam […]."[94]

As evinced in the discourses analyzed in chapter 4, ideological programs for the

universalization of "authentic" Islam through the supposed autonomous universalism of

Sufism necessarily project an anti-universal Muslim Other whose heteronomous discursive

and social practices are equated with anti-modern fanaticism and the cause of irrational

violence. As Brown notes, such opposition is based upon the asymmetrical conceit that while

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[92] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 169-70 (emphasis mine).

[93] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 2005), 178.

[94] Saba Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire: Islam and the War of Terror," in *Women's Studies on the Edge,* ed. Joan Wallach Scott (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 106.

non-liberal peoples are imagined to be "ruled and ordered by" culture and religion, secular-liberal universalism imagines itself as inherently outside of culture, religion, and history—i.e., the asymmetrical hubris of zero degrees. Such asymmetry, Brown thus observes, "turns on an imagined opposition between culture and individual moral autonomy, in which the former vanquishes the latter *unless culture is itself subordinated by liberalism*."[95] The asymmetry between heteronomous tradition and universal autonomy further produces Manichean binaries positing heteronomous tradition against political freedom and equality.[96] It is precisely this hegemonic, ideological logic that creates the equivalence between fundamentalism and heteronomous Islamic practice, resulting in current political attempts to make the lifestyles of Muslims who engage in such heteronomous practice "provisional if not extinct through a process of gradual but incessant reform."[97]

This study began in assessing claims about Ibn 'Arabi's religious universalism through comparative discourse analysis in combination with a historicization of Ibn 'Arabi's positions on the religious Other within his Islamic intellectual milieu. I have shown that a discursive image of Ibn 'Arabi as a universalist has been constructed by Western scholars who are indebted to, or have been informed by, universalist discourses that mobilize longstanding Western discursive practices choked with Eurocentrism and its attendant hegemonic ideology of racism. A key element of such discourse maintains that authentic religious subjectivity is *transcendently independent* from religious form and is not constituted by it or subject to its attendant exclusivity.

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[95] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 151 (emphasis mine).

[96] Ibid.

[97] Mahmood, "Feminism," 106.

Such recourse to a transcendent religious *a priori* that dissociates religious truth (rational or suprarational) from the map of worldly hierarchies strikingly parallels the conceit of "objectivity" formed through the invisible "sovereign gaze" of sixteenth century European cartography and its Archimedean location point of zero degrees. It is this assumed "power of a *Deus absconditus*," as Castro-Gómez asserts, that fueled the universalization of European truth claims through the process of hegemonic imperial power and a presumed racial, religious, and civilizational superiority. Refined through Cartesian dualism and Kantian idealism, similar assumptions of superiority in the name of "universal" ideals have discursively denuded Ibn ʿArabi of his Semitic tradition, forced him into the Procrustean mold of Western universalism, and made him into an image of a proto-European Muslim. Not only are such anachronistic discursive images inaccurate, but they authorize ideological and hegemonic programs of Western reform that seek in the name of Sufism to efface the very same heteronomy that Ibn ʿArabi himself asserted.

While this study has shown that Ibn ʿArabi's mysticism was heteronomously constituted by his religious tradition, it has also shown that the modern Western conceit of "religion" as a universally transcendent essence cannot exist *in vacuo*. Although the long-standing European discursive tradition of autonomy claims a universal "empty" space, it would appear that not only nature but also the *nature of human discursivity* abhors such emptiness. As the history of European epistemology shows—and the discourses on Ibn ʿArabi and Sufism analyzed in the foregoing chapters corroborate—it is none other than the self-image of Western subjectivity that so often fills the void left by the transcendence it claims to attain.

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354

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